University of Alberta

PORTRAIT OF AN ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

by

Charles H. Katz ©

A dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1997

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a dissertation entitled PORTRAIT OF AN ADULT LITERACY LEARNER submitted by CHARLES HERB KATZ in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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All those men who are hungry, all those men who are cold, all those men who are afraid...

All those men of whom *we* are afraid, who crush the jealous emerald of our dreams, who twist the fragile curve of our smiles, all those men we face, who ask us no questions, but to whom we put strange ones.

Who are they?

I ask you, I ask myself. Who are they, those creatures starving for humanity who stand buttressed against the impalpable frontiers of complete recognition?

Who are they, in truth, those creatures, who hide, who are hidden by social truth...

Franz Fanon,
Toward the African Revolution. (1967) p. 3.

For

my Father,

Eddy Katz,

1923 - 1997

PREFACE

In 1972, I wrote an M.A. thesis entitled "Ethnic Disparities and Educational Policy in Israel, 1948 to 1968." My desire to explore how a government might use education to create a more just and equitable society emerged from my experience as a teacher and reading specialist in inner-city schools in Montreal and from an idealism that I am fortunate to have learned in my parent's home. I concluded then that we must struggle, even when we don't succeed. I had a very strong belief in the power of education to create the conditions of an equitable community.

It is almost twenty-five years since I had the privilege of going far afield to dig in that garden of idealism. My idealism is intact but the privilege of addressing this question again is much more costly. To be idealists today we must also be calculating realists. When I returned to the university, I held a strong belief, if not completely in the power of education, then at least in the power of literacy - of reading and writing - to transform individuals and through them, society and nation. When the opportunity arose, I set out to explore how this transformation might work. When people seemed reluctant to become what I expected of them, I was first puzzled, then frustrated, then angry - at them. When those emotions were mostly spent, I began to search for a way to understand what this frustrating but optimistic experience meant about my conception of literacy and about the relationship of literacy and equality. I learned that literacy is both much less and much more than I had imagined. I learned a new respect for the power of reading and writing and for the people and their children who refuse to stop struggling with and for it. This document is the record of one man's journey with reading and writing and my travels as a researcher with him. Our story provides some ways to understand and act on our collective experiences with and about literacy.

ABSTRACT

Research suggests that marginally literate adults possess complex and varied attitudes toward literacy and participation in adult basic literacy education programmes. Little has been written about what happens when a marginally literate adult engages in learning to read and write. This study addresses the question: What does learning to read and write entail for a marginally literate adult? The study reports the results of a research project that examined the literacy learning experience of one man in a community-based literacy programme. Thomas is a thirty-five year old husband and father of two children. He is unemployed and on Welfare and reports that he enrolled in a participatory adult basic education programme to improve his reading and writing and the chances of his children avoiding his fate. A naturalistic approach was adopted to understanding literacy in Thomas' life. The study was conducted over a 21 month period during which Thomas was a student at the Centre. Participant-observation complemented interviews, questionnaires, videotapes and samples of Thomas' writing. A sociocultural perspective on language learning informed the research. Aspects of critical theory, including the broad concept of resistance, were used to explore the data.

The findings of the study indicate that Thomas participated more fully in informal than in formal literacy learning opportunities, he understood reading as a practical tool used to accomplish personal goals and he considered writing to be his greatest challenge. He viewed written communication as a valuable end in itself. In addition, personal computers played an important role in Thomas' evolution as a writer. The findings also suggest that cultural differences existed between Thomas' expectations for literacy learning and those provided by the school for his son.

The study suggests the relevance to adult literacy practice and theory of the need of marginally literate adults to attain and maintain control over their lives as an aspect of literacy learning. Further research is recommended into: the consequences of computer use in adult literacy learning, and definitions of literacy in intergenerational and Family Literacy programmes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study that is reported in these pages is the fruit of an adventure in which many people have shared. It is my privilege to acknowledge their guidance, support, thoughtfulness, example and companionship.

To enter into a new and different community is a difficult task. The students and staff of the Centre — Sarah, Bob, Brianne, Carol, Camille, Monica, Sheila, Midge, James and all the other people who lived there — welcomed me and accepted me into their community and taught me how to live among them. Thomas, especially, and Susan and their children, Brian and Lynn, were subject to my questioning. They too cooperated with me throughout.

Before she agreed to serve as my supervisor, I was attracted to Dr. Ruth Hayden by her scholarly capabilities. These include the qualities of clarity of thought, fearlessness and dedication to speaking and writing with eloquent forcefulness. During the course of my research, I was privileged to have her as my teacher and dissertation supervisor. Together with Dr. Hayden, Drs. Grace Malicky and Roberta McKay comprised my supervisory committee. As a doctoral student, I was fortunate to apprentice with Dr. Grace Malicky. She has been a consistent example for me of the highest ethical, personal and academic standards. As a Graduate Teaching Assistant, I taught a number of undergraduate courses in the teaching of the Language Arts in Elementary, Junior and Senior High School. Dr. Roberta McKay has been my mentor and friend. From her I have begun to learn how to be a more thoughtful teacher and person in the classroom. Dr. Myer Horowitz has been an inspiration to me since I was a snowball-throwing ruffian on the streets of Cote St. Luc. I am grateful to have had the benefit of his intellectual attentiveness and thoroughness. Similarly, Dr. Tracey Derwing has enriched this work with her experience in adult education and her insightful questions and comments. The External Examiner of the dissertation was Dr. Claudia Mitchell of McGill University. Her comments on my work and her questions were thorough and broad and have aided in the further development of my understanding of the subject.

I am indebted to the Department of Elementary Education and its chair, Dr. Robert Jackson, for the scholarship which was awarded me and for the teaching assignments I received. David Calhoon and Carol Leroy and I spent many hours doing what graduate students do. We talked, discussed, argued and listened to each other. In the process, I developed and refined ideas and received the advice that only friends can offer.

In good times and in bad, I have been able to rely on my family. My father and mother have been models of responsible and dedicated citizens. To complete this study I have relied on the intelligence, teaching experience and toughness of my wife, Debbie Reid Katz. I am profoundly grateful to her and to my children - Jacques, Oren and Elizabeth, who have supported me in this effort.

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview of the Chapter

My purpose in this chapter is to provide the blueprint for the study. To accomplish this purpose, I begin by briefly explaining how I came to the study. I then specify the aim of the study, state the questions that comprise the main engine of the research, and describe the conceptual framework for the study and the meaning that I assign to essential terms. Finally, I outline what I consider to be the significant contributions of the study, and present an overview of the way in which I have structured this dissertation.

Introduction

When I first began to work with less literate adults, I did so with two broad, unexamined assumptions underpinning my actions. The first assumption was that everybody knew how to read, or at least that everyone had known how to read at one time. If adults decided to enroll in a literacy programme, it was to re-acquaint themselves with something that they had forgotten. Secondly, I believed that everyone who had decided to return to "school" either loved to read for the sake of reading or wanted to love reading for itself.

You may conclude from this description that I was a very naive - even narcissistic - person when I came to this work. I may have been naive but it is also true that many people hold these and similar, well-intentioned and unexamined assumptions about people whom we refer to as illiterate, less literate or marginally literate adults. Before I began the task of researching the study that is reported in this document, I taught, observed and interviewed many less literate men and women as they undertook the task of learning to read and write. I began to understand that being marginally literate and trying to learn to read and write as an adult in Canadian society in the 1990's is a sometimes dangerous, difficult, complex and serious business for most people who enroll in adult basic education programmes. It may also be filled with optimism and hope, change, confidence, learning and accomplishment. Relatively little is known about what happens to less literate adults when they try to learn to read and write.

The research literature that addresses adult literacy - to which I will turn in greater detail in Chapter 2 - speaks about the possible structural causes of illiteracy. There are a number of elegant theoretical accounts of how marginal literacy comes about and is sustained (Giroux, 1983; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, 1971; Brodkey, 1992; Quigley, 1992;

Stuckey, 1991; Gee, 1989). There are fewer but nonetheless powerful statements about how marginally literate people can transform themselves and their socio-political environment (Freire, 1970a).

Wagner (1987) has pointed out that literacy is always and everywhere primarily an individual struggle. I have taken this as an important point. There are some investigations that focus on individuals and small groups and attempt to understand, describe and interpret the world of these individuals and groups and the course of their engagement with literacy (Horseman, 1990; Rigg, 1985; Purcell-Gates, 1995). These accounts not only add a valuable human dimension to the understanding of illiteracy and adult literacy learning, they also provide the beginnings of an empirical basis on which to construct theoretical accounts against which pervasive ideological perspectives can be tested. Many of these studies point out that women undertake to learn to read and write in order to change themselves into independent individuals. The studies also suggest that often husbands, family and social institutions undermine their efforts. The studies document the frequent failure and disappointment that these women experience in their quest for literacy.

The desire to learn to read and write must certainly have both universal characteristics and diversity. In addition to gender, questions of context, of time and of place as well as other factors differ in examining individual engagement with literacy learning. It is empirically and theoretically important to gather findings from as many settings and individual cases as possible.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the literacy learning experiences of one individual in order to add to, modify and challenge the theoretical and empirical research that attempts to describe and explain the meaning of literacy, its role in the lives of marginally literate people and what happens to marginally literate people when they undertake to learn to read and write better. In particular, I explored the applicability of Resistance Theory to explain marginal literacy and literacy learning among adults. I examined the degree to which independence, social networks, reciprocity and symmetry characterize and animate the lives of a marginally literate individual. I looked at ways in which a marginally literate person participates in an adult basic education programme and the meaning of reading and writing to that person. I examine intergenerational aspects of literacy learning in the family life of a marginally literate adult learner. In sum, I have attempted to construct a portrait of an adult literacy learner.

Research Questions

The research has been guided by the general question: What do learning to read and write and participation in a basic literacy programme entail for a marginally literate adult? I have looked at the involvement of a number of elements in the learning process. These include modes and degrees of participation, reading, writing and intergenerational literacy.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

O'Brien (in Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1996) suggests two rules for judging the appropriate use of theory in the preparation of qualitative research. First, locate research in a substantive theoretical perspective of the discipline. Second, make explicit the theoretical framework that helps determine topic selection, methodological issues and fundamental individual assumptions and biases of the researcher. These criteria generally conform to categories that have been suggested by others (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Wolcott, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

The perspective that I bring to this study is a sociocultural one. From a sociocultural viewpoint, literacy is a social construction that is culturally and politically maintained. Gee (1989) locates the constructed character of the notion of literacy in relation to the concept of Discourses which he describes as ways of looking at the world, ways of being that integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, gestures, body language, clothing, etc. Secondary Discourses are "identity kits" and are associated with various institutions in society - churches, professions, government organizations, schools - that may be dominant or non-dominant. Gee (1989, pp. 7-9) defines literacy as "mastery of or fluent control over a Secondary Discourse". In this perspective, there are many discourses and many literacies. Street (1984, 1992a, 1992b) argues that seen cross-culturally, American society (and by extension Canadian society also) is dominated by a particular, culturally defined set of literacy practices.

The work of Brodkey (1992), Gee (1989), Street (1984), Barton (1994a, 1994b), Malicky (1991), Purcell-Gates (1995) and others, suggests that the Western and Canadian view of literacy is characterized by a large degree of ethnocentricity. What we know as "literacy" is asserted to be a form of "mainstream literacy", the dominance of which reflects the ideology of the powerful and is also a means through which that ideology and associated status quo is maintained. Other literacies exist outside of the ring of power. These are seldom heard and they bear little legitimacy except as the objects of study by academics.

I define "mainstream" or the current dominant definition of literacy as consisting of the following set of interrelated beliefs. It is a belief that literacy is primarily if not exclusively print, most legitimately encountered in books, official documents and newspapers and also to a lesser degree in magazines or other written materials. Literacy is seen as being intrinsically valuable. This view is related to another belief that is associated with literacy: its possession is the mark of a morally whole person. Literacy is also seen as critical to the achievement of upward mobility and increased potential for consumption. This perspective is animated by the idea that more literacy is associated with better employment. Literacy is understood to be a condition for participation in public debate. Literacy is seen as possessable. Underlying this belief is the idea that literacy is a set of autonomous skills that are always and everywhere accessible in the same way to all people. It is believed that the form of literacy described here is the only valid and effective one. Finally and ironically, literacy is often thought of and spoken about as an absence of activity, something that stands in opposition to "doing something", representing a non-activity.

The conventional and popular term "illiterate" is used to describe someone who is lacking in or devoid of "literacy". Other phrases that are in common usage include: "low literate", "marginally literate", "restricted literacy", and "functional literacy". In all of these examples, there is an assumed measure of literacy animating the terms used and the context in which it is applied. If literacy is a social construction, then it is always someone's literacy. That particular definition is an integral part of an ideology that legitimates the power and self-interest of the segment of the ruling class that exercise effective power at a given time. Most often the definition of literacy against which people are measured is the definition associated with a dominant elite. For example, the growing power of business elites has been accompanied by the rise to prominence of the concept of workplace literacy (Gowen, 1992). Earlier definitions of literacy reflected liberal perspectives. Post-World War II definitions of literacy linked it to social and economic mobility that might accrue to the individual who was more literate. Definitions of Workplace Literacy do not emphasize the value of literacy to the individual but to the workplace and the profit of business and business owners and shareholders.

Thomas' mastery of the dominant Secondary Discourses of Canadian society is incomplete. I want to express this in such a way as to not imply that he is inferior, less competent as a person or morally lacking because of this situation. The use of terms such as "illiterate" and "low literate (literacy)" suggest that something is missing, that Thomas is lacking, or that there is something wrong with him, that he does not measure up. I view Thomas' literacy more as a question of difference - of dominant and subordinate kinds of literacies - and of access to power and its material benefits, that is to say, of his poverty.

The persistent association in survey research between poverty and low literacy has been noted for more than three decades. In the United States, under the umbrella of the Just Society and in Canada in many initiatives, governments, other public organizations and many volunteers have devoted much time and money to the attempt to attenuate this situation. In spite of these intentions and efforts, those whom we classify as poor, as uneducated and unschooled, as the "lower classes" seem by and large to remain outside our "magic circle of literacy."

Gillett (in Wagner, 1987) states that the clear relationship among literacy and poverty, hunger, joblessness and sickness suggests that literacy is not the problem at all, that literacy hardly matters to someone who is sick and hungry, and that attention to literacy diverts social concern from social action to charity. Stuckey, (1991) asserts that literacy has no magic either to lift us up or to cast us down. With it, we can simply better understand the conditions of economic inequality and how they are sustained.

To reflect this view of the nature and use of the terms "literacy" and "illiteracy" and their variants, I have chosen to use the phrase "marginal literacy" to describe Thomas' literacy. I hope that this adjectival phrase will reflect the state of his literacy as being on the edges of societal power and as a consequence of being different from the mainstream. This is not to deny the value of individual action in favour of an underlying explanation of social and institutional forces as governing social reproduction. Thomas is certainly responsible for his own life-decisions. He has decided to enroll at the Centre[1].

It has been difficult to put aside the moralistic and ethical, almost apocalyptic values that I have come to associate with literacy[2]. Stuckey's (1991) understanding of literacy as a

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[1] The Centre is an open access, community-based adult basic education programme housed in the Inner-City Services Co-operative and serving mostly poor, marginally literate people living in this mid-sized Western Canadian city, many clustered in the inner city area near to the co-op. During the time that the research was being conducted, the number of people attending the Centre more than doubled from about 40 to about 100 full-time and drop-in students.

[2] In Essai sur l'origine des langues, J-J. Rousseau wrote:

> These three ways of writing correspond almost exactly to three different stages according to which one can consider men gathered into a nation. The depicting of objects is appropriate

particular tool for the "doubter" provides me with a context in which to approach the morally charged question of what role literacy does play in sustaining or helping to transform the status quo.

Significance of the Study

A part of the value of this study resides in my long-term integration into the community of students at the Centre and especially my friendship with Thomas[3], the respondent in this study. Many studies of the everyday negotiation of literacy needs by marginally literate adults and of their literacy learning practices and emotions are based on questionnaire and on interview data that are gathered by observers who are strangers to the environment into which they enter for the purpose of specific and short term data gathering (Teale, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1994; Elish-Piper, 1997). The data to be gathered are closely defined. Other events and meanings in the observed situation are often ignored. Analysis is carried out by other researchers. This process is particularly susceptible to misinterpretations and cultural misunderstandings because of the disjointed nature of the research process. There is little attention paid to individual, cultural and situational meanings associated with literacy. In this study, I became a member of an adult learning community and, over a long period of time, aimed to understand the meanings of literacy learning as they were understood by the adult students who attended that programme. While this approach is not unique, it has seldom been adopted in adult literacy research. This approach yields a view of an adult literacy learner from a different perspective than is found in most of the literature.

This study contributes to an understanding of the theory and practice of literacy and literacy

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> to a savage people, signs of words and of propositions to a barbaric people, and the alphabet to a civilizing people.

Clanchy (Graff, 1981) reminds us that Rousseau's view is not an aberration of "Reason" but a sub-theme of it. The automatic coupling of reading and writing and the close association of literacy with the language one speaks are not universal norms but products of modern European culture. Literacy in this modern sense is so deeply implanted from childhood in every twentieth century scholar that it is difficult to liberate oneself from its preconceptions or to avoid thinking of it as an automatic measure of progress.

[3] Thomas is a pseudonym which I chose to remind me that one of the more problematical aspects of power, including my own as researcher and author, is the tendency deliberately or inadvertently to silence those who are not as powerful. The powerful write the history the we come to know. The Book of Thomas is one of the Gnostic Gospels that was supressed by powerful bishops when Christianity was becoming legitimated through the conversion of political elites during the later Roman Empire. This supression isn't surprising. The Gnostic Gospels describe a personal religious journey and advocate individual freedom. Together with Augustinian revisionism, the canonical Gospels are more suitable to political order and to an appreciation of the status quo, (Pagel, 1979). How successful they've been! Who even doubts these things now?

education in six areas. First, in Canada and around the world, national, provincial or state and municipal governments, international organizations such as UNESCO and private and community based groups have addressed the phenomenon of what they define as illiteracy with conferences, declarations of intent and of hope and vision, policy, bureaucracy, public funding, research, curriculum, programme and staff. The cost, measured in money and in the time and effort of well meaning and devoted people, is an indicator of how we value literacy and the power we assign to it in the creation and maintenance of society.

In spite of the continuing large expenditures on adult basic education programmes and literacy campaigns, research suggests that these programmes attract only a small percentage of the population that might benefit directly from them. From among those who do choose to attend programmes, many drop out before completion or without having achieved their desired goals.

Like most educational policy and curriculum, most adult literacy programming is written for the faceless, general "illiterate" adult. Further, programmes and policy are invariably prepared by politicians, administrators and teachers who are in positions of power. Their literacy reflects mainstream ideas of literacy, embodying mainstream socioeconomic and cultural values and views of literacy's value and purpose and of those who are perceived as lacking such properties. There is little in the research literature that explores the meanings of literacy to marginally literate adults, their reasons for choosing to attend adult basic education programmes and the nature of their relationship with literacy in these programmes and outside of them. In exploring and interpreting the meaning of literacy in the life of one such adult, this study offers a basis on which adult education policy, programmes and funding can be more effectively developed and implemented.

Second, the literature about adult literacy learning is most often situated in the conventional programmes that predominate in this area. Community-based projects are a more recent phenomenon in Canada. Little is known about the problems, issues and challenges that have accompanied their emergence as a way of addressing the needs of poor and marginally literate adults. The existing literature consists of broad and brief descriptions of programmes and elaborations of the ideology underlying them. This study takes a critical look at a community-based programme and highlights issues and opportunities that have not yet been fully addressed in theory and practice.

Third, beyond some statistical and survey research findings, little is known about the meaning of literacy to men and their struggle to learn to read and write. This is particularly so in relation to men in community-based literacy programmes. To some extent, community based programmes in Canada have become a focal point for a feminist ideological perspective that has taken as its purpose support through literacy learning for the many women who live desperate and oppressive lives. In adult and in family literacy research, the focus on men has most often been associated with examining literacy programmes for men who are imprisoned. The study reported here looks at the literacy learning of one man who is a father and husband, with a work history, who came to an adult basic education programme to learn to read and write better.

Fourth, during the past three years, computer technology has made inroads into public schools and adult learning programmes in this province. The provincial government has pledged substantial funding to introduce computers and internet capabilities in every classroom in the province by the end of the century. At the community-based programme in which I conducted my study, as in other adult projects, corporate donations and outright purchase have resulted in the acquisition of six computers. The literature about computers and technology in education is devoted mainly to the implicitly non-critical and optimistic question of how to get the most out of them. Yet, computer use in schools and adult programmes must occasion disturbing questions about socialization for consumerism, about critical literacy and about learning in isolation versus group learning. This study attempts to place these questions in a critical context.

Fifth, Fingeret (1983) highlights the way in which marginally literate adults develop and maintain elaborate networks of friends, family and neighbours with whom they negotiate the exchange of skills that allows them to preserve their independence without being literate. In spite of its explanatory power and practical implications, there has been little research that has followed up Fingeret's findings. My study examines the respondent's use of social networks in the context of his patterns of participation in and outside the programme that he attended in formal and informal learning activities. The findings suggest the transferability of social networking to adult programmes.

Finally, Gee (1989) presents the idea of "mushfake literacy" as a form of cobbled together secondary discourse with which marginally literate adult literacy learners may be able to "get by" in a world where their capacity to learn these secondary discourses promises access to greater power, satisfaction and money. Gee states that adult literacy learners are not in a position ever to acquire these discourses to the degree that they would benefit from them. Gee sees mushfake literacy as a poor substitute for real acquisition of secondary discourse. For Gee, mushfake literacy is an afterthought to infuse some optimism into an otherwise pessimistic appraisal of adult literacy learning. Delpit (1986, 1988, 1992) takes issue with Gee's position and advocates for the power of mushfake literacy as an authentic pedagogical tool with which to help students who are not from the mainstream to gain a share of wealth and power. In this study, I examine the respondent's use of computers in the light of the debate about mushfake literacy.

Structural Overview of the Dissertation

Among my aims in writing this study has been a desire to recall and to communicate the sense of immediacy and poignancy of Thomas' wish to engage literacy, and at the same time, to leave it behind so that I might gain the perspective that I needed to understand, explore and reflect on his and my experiences. These conflicting needs as well as others, influence the form in which Thomas' and my experience have been codified in this report.

My wish to recall the complexity and immediacy of Thomas' engagement with literacy and my task as a doctoral researcher is also a reminder of the human, even academic tendency toward a kind of categorizing that drains experience of its lifeblood. Farella (1993) has written eloquently and with great power about how academics and particularly anthropologists in the modern ethnographic tradition have made non-mainstream culture and life a meaningless caricature through culturally self-serving processes of trying to label parts of these phenomena for storage and display as quaint customs. Stuckey (1991) is likewise scathing in her condemnation of the results of most ethnographic research in literacy studies.

These critiques and warnings are important to me. It has been my privilege to have been received into a community of people who accepted me. Thomas and his family have taken me into their lives. I, too, had come to stay at the adult literacy programme for both professional and private reasons. People stood by me; they guided me and were gentle with me when I made mistakes that sometimes hurt them. They encouraged me to study, learn and write about them. I learned much that I did not previously understand, not only about marginally literate adults - "them" - but about myself and about the nature of literacy as we debate and define it. I not only feel a debt of gratitude to these people; I feel a part of this community and a sense of loyalty to Thomas and to all of the people there. So, the writing of this report is more than an analysis and a vocabulary accurately to correspond to it. It is an attempt in its language and structure as well to communicate my understanding of the nature of their viewpoint.

I have tried to reflect my own sense of wonder and passion for the people at the adult literacy programme who struggle daily with the temptation of literacy. I have tried to do this firstly, in the language that I use to communicate my experience and Thomas'. In addition to the language that I have chosen to use, I have tried to do this through the structure of this report.

In Chapter 2, I present my interpretation of the contribution made by selected relevant research and theoretical literature to knowledge about the experience of marginal literacy and literacy learning. I also briefly review some of the literature about community-based adult literacy programmes and intergenerational and Family Literacy programmes. Chapter 3 describes and discusses the methodological characteristics of my study and the procedures that were adopted to gather and analyze the data. I specify the way in which I gained access to the research site and why I chose Thomas as the study respondent. I explain the use of data gathering procedures such as observation schedules, interviews, questionnaires, field notes and videotapes. I refer to my personal role and perspective as a participant observer. I introduce and examine some methodological problems that I encountered and how I responded to them.

Chapter 4 presents an interpretation of Thomas' personal history and relates this history to the Centre, which is the main setting of the study and the link between Thomas and the literacy for which he was searching. The link between Thomas and the Centre is reviewed in relation to the question of why Thomas decided to renew his efforts to improve his reading and writing. In Chapter 5, I present the findings of the research project. The findings of the study are presented as a portrait of a literacy learner. The findings are exhibited in four categories: Thomas' modes of participation in literacy learning, the ways in which he views and uses reading, the meaning and importance of writing to Thomas and, his views about his children's literacy learning and his role in this learning process. In Chapter 6, I address the implications of the findings of the study for theory and practice.

In writing this thesis, I have tried to take my audience into account. I feel it my obligation to present this work in a form that is understandable to and debatable by those whose interests are most at issue, the students, the community of the Centre, other community based programmes and other people who might at a future date be fortunate enough to come to it. During the course of my research, I was approached by people at the Centre who asked me when I would be finished my study so it would be ready for them to read. When this study is complete, I intend on distilling the findings and the relevant issues that I have raised in this research and introducing these findings and issues to students and staff at the Centre in a series of group meetings. In preparing the material for group discussion, I will attend to ensuring that they are presented in a form that is both welcoming to the Centre community and pedagogically effective.

I have written this study using language that is as jargon free and as accessible as I can make it. I have not tried to hide my human feelings, where they come into play. In writing this report I do not want to leave behind the warmth that I feel toward Thomas as a person nor ignore the complexity, ambiguity, selfishness, intensity, humour and plain humanness of this man.

Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and discuss selected relevant research and theoretical literature that have examined literacy learning among marginally literate adults. I identify two broad perspectives on literacy based on a distinction made by Street (1984). I describe a range of views within each of these two perspectives. I refer to the characteristics that are common to each category and discuss the contribution that the literature has made to our understanding of the lives of marginally literate adults. I also briefly examine some of the literature about community-based adult literacy programmes and literature in other areas of relevance to my study including family and intergenerational studies. These include the post-structuralist standpoint and research that has explored literacy in historical perspective. I locate my own viewpoint within this literature.

How We Understand Literacy

Two Conceptions of Literacy

My view of the literature about marginal literacy among adults is structured by Street's (1984) distinction between two conceptualizations of literacy. Street labeled these literacy conceptions as the "autonomous" and the "ideological". From an autonomous perspective, literacy is understood as separate from the social, political, cultural and economic forces operating in society. From this point-of-view, literacy is also seen as universally available and unchanging. From the ideological standpoint, literacy is viewed as an expression of power relations in a society and an instrument for maintenance of the status quo. Literacy is not understood as unitary. Rather, there are many or multiple literacies within a community. Dominant literacies offer access to power and wealth. Non-dominant literacies do not do so. Dominant literacies are associated with dominant groups. Thus, from an ideological perspective, access to dominant literacies is restricted to members of the elites.

Literacy as Autonomous

The Deficit Perspective

When literacy is conceived as autonomous, universally accessible and unchanging, the person who has not achieved these attributes of literacy is frequently perceived as being individually deviant or deficient for not "acquiring" literacy. Regional, national or global literacy surveys that are associated with governmental agencies, literacy campaigns and business groups promoting "Workplace Literacy" reinforce a view of literacy as a commodity that is available in unchanging form to all people (Calamai, 1988; Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, 1988; Northern Alberta Development Council, June 1989). It is very difficult to measure and gauge "how much" literacy people "have." This is not least because even official definitions of literacy may vary widely. Nonetheless, the idea of literacy as an unchanging, unitary commodity, asset or thing implies that it can be accurately measured. By superimposing financial assumptions that imply that literacy is an asset or, in its absence, a deficit, it is possible to recommend and apply "management" processes as solutions to the "problem" of low literacy in the population. The public debate, as it is reported and shaped in newspapers and in government and private reports, is primarily a debate about how much literacy people have. The statistical survey results that often suggest high levels of "illiteracy" in Canada are accompanied and communicated by means of medical and military metaphors and terminology. Words and images such as "campaign", "surgery", "cut", "eradicate", "attack", "crisis", "defeat" and "mobilize" are often used in conjunction with an autonomous and statistical perspective on literacy. Periodically, these surveys provoke alarm. Often elaborate literacy campaigns follow, while the amount of literacy that we, as a nation "have", appears to remain generally unchanged. These metaphors help to locate the problem in the individual marginally literate person. When programmes or literacy projects and campaigns fail, the marginally literate "client" is found at fault.

Positivist Perspectives

The deficit view may be seen in some of the positivist research studies that examine attraction and retention in adult literacy programmes. The considerable research about attraction and retention (participation and non-participation) in adult basic education (Beder & Valentine, 1990; Boshier & Collins, 1985; Cervero & Kirkpatrick, 1990; Garrison, 1985; 1990; Hayes, 1988) in many cases proceeds from implied assumptions that the programmes are inherently worthwhile, are for the benefit of dependent, deficient adults and will result in learning (Ziegahn, 1992). For example, Garrison (1985) examined the relevance of courses and clarity of student goals as well as "psychosocial variables" to retention and withdrawal from adult basic literacy programmes. The surprising finding that students who withdrew from programmes found courses more relevant than students who persisted was explained as a reflection of dropouts' unrealistic occupational goals in light of their low academic ability and socioeconomic status.

The term "retention", which echoes of incarceration, compulsion and school failure, hints at the low status of adults labeled non-literate and the “crusading” fervor that characterize some literacy learning programmes (Graff, 1981). The implied deficit model of literacy in which a deficiency is located in the "patient" or "target" is suggested in the use of the term “barriers to participation”. Hayes (1988) conceptualized student non-participation in terms of “deterrents to participation”. She identified five factors affecting non-participation including low self confidence, social disapproval, low personal priority, situational barriers and negative attitudes. As Hayes’ approach illustrates, participation is assumed to be positive, whereas non-participation is thought of as resulting from negative elements that deny the marginally literate adult the opportunity to participate in programmes being offered. Once found, it is argued, action can be taken to remove the deficit and help the patient to health. These variables amount to "patient" problems or imply them. Other similar factors that are identified in the literature are low self-esteem, inability to manage time, poor financial planning that leaves little time to pursue worthwhile activities, a disorderly life, and inability to overcome psychological problems (Darkenwald & Valentine 1985). Bigotry, gender discrimination, inappropriate and competitive learning models, incompetent teaching, inability to see cultural differences and other ways of living life are included in barriers to participation.

Research that is based on a view of literacy as an autonomous commodity is most often based on positivist values and assumptions about research and the nature of social reality. These studies are expressed as statistical surveys and often as quantitative studies of factors that may influence retention in adult basic education programmes. These studies contribute to our knowledge of adult low literacy inasmuch as they highlight the importance that communities attach to reading and writing. These studies also serve to keep questions of literacy in the public forum. The deficit view is tenacious and popular and reminds us that difference is not easily accepted in most communities. The concept of individual responsibility is deeply rooted in western society and can be expanded to cover and stifle the voices of marginally literate people whose lives and uses of literacy do not fit easily with the dominant views and definitions of literacy.

Literacy as an Expression of Ideology

Socio-cultural Views

Bernstein (1971) observed the language practices of school aged children from different socio-economic backgrounds in the UK. His concepts of “Restricted” and “Elaborated” codes suggest that language was part of the intricate maintenance of class distinctions and differential educational opportunity. Schools were seen as instruments for reproduction of the class system in which those who were socialized to an elaborated code were most successfully integrated into school culture. The specificity and social context of restricted codes identified their users as probable failures in schooling, unable to create the generalizations that were recognized as the lingua franca of middle class participation in society. Bernstein's work helped to shift the focus of attention away from blaming the learner for failure and toward an appreciation of the existence of multiple literacies. He established that ways of speaking and using language are an intimate part of social, economic and cultural life and that schools respond positively to certain kinds of language use that are compatible with the culture of schools.

In Ways with words, Heath (1983) explored literacy in three geographically contiguous communities in the United States in socio-economic and cultural perspective and through the lens of individual language learning and use among children and adults within their homes, communities and school. Her work included close observation of children's language use in the home as well as the school. Her findings are similar to those of Bernstein in relation to the role of schools in differentiating students on the basis of language use. There is a growing literature (Purcell-Gates, 1994; 1995; Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith, 1995; Elish-Piper, 1997; Rigg, 1985) that follows in this tradition by focusing on literacy in the lives of individual adults and children in close detail and in sociocultural context, usually in the home. Heath was also able to show us the possibilities of working with teachers to effect changes in their ways of viewing children and in their own attitudes toward difference.

Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith (1995) reported on the degree of print variation and penetration in the lives of 24 children in 20 families from different ethnic backgrounds, living in an American inner city. A distinguishing feature of their study is the effort that was made to enter into the homes and lives of the study participants to observe uses of literacy. The authors documented a "vast variety in the number and types of uses of print in homes of low-SES families." (p. 572). Elish-Piper (1997) conducted a descriptive study of literacy use among 13 low-income families who were participating in a summer literacy project in a US city. Elish-Piper's findings echo those of Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith in noting the variety of literacy activities among the participating families. She also noted that most of the families used literacy as a tool rather than as an end in itself. Some families used literacy in a more "school-like" way (p.264) than other families who used it to "take care of business." (P. 265). In both of these studies, a sociocultural perspective allowed the researchers to look for strengths and diversity in literacy use.

The focused, empirical studies of literacy within families and communities is complemented by theorizing about the role of language in relation to social reproduction. Gee (1987, 1989, 1991) developed and applied the idea of Discourse and related it to literacy. Gee defines Discourses as follows:

> Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities as well as gestures, body position and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of "identity kit" which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize. (Gee, 1989, p. 8)

Gee describes our Primary Discourse as the one that we acquire through primary socialization and which we use to make sense of the world. We all interact with social institutions beyond our "home" community — schools, religious institutions, professions, business, political cultures. Each of these institutions "commands and demands" one or more Discourses, which Gee labels Secondary Discourses. Gee defines literacy as mastery of or fluent control over a Secondary Discourse. For Gee literacy is always plural. This view allows us to think about literacy in a decentred way and to explore the different dimensions of relationships among literacies. There are many literacies including dominant literacies and subordinate literacies that correspond and react to the distribution of power in society. There is mainstream literacy and there are literacies within discourses that exist outside the mainstream community. Gee's work does not so much address the need to operate within the status quo as much as it helps to describe and account for the maintenance of its balance. Gee's perspective reflects pessimism about the possibility of social change. He gives individuals credit for their resources, but in the form of "mushfake" literacy. Mushfake literacy may be seen as a limited form of Secondary Discourse which has little potential. In Gee's framework, as in Bernstein's, it is difficult to move from one caste to another.

Delpit's thinking also reflects a concern for the role of literacy in addressing socio-economic disparities (1986; 1988; 1992). Her point of departure is a process versus a skills approach to learning to write and to speak in schools. Delpit advocates that mainstream teachers relinquish some of their power by teaching minority group children not only mainstream writing skills but also the implicit and the explicit rules of power that will allow students to compete equitably. In her rejection of Gee's pessimistic appraisal of change as embodied in his conception of Primary and Secondary Discourse, Delpit sharpened the debate about how to respond to the traditional role of language in school as an instrument of economic differentiation (1992). Whether one does or does not accept Delpit's implicit acceptance of the status quo and the school context as a given, her work serves to contextualize literacy within the problem of the distribution of power.

The work of both Fagan (1993) and Fingeret (1983) parallel Heath's approach. They have contributed to a growing appreciation for the diverse language resources that the "non-literate" and the culturally different may command. Fagan's study is relevant to my research because the individuals whom he studied share Thomas' cultural and community background. Fagan reported on an ethnographically informed study of 19 low-SES individuals (of whom nine were considered "core" participants) living in an urban setting in a Canadian province bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Among his findings are: oral language may be used as "an interpretive vehicle for written language within Primary Discourses, background knowledge is essential in communicating via print within Primary Discourse, and those who do not share needed background knowledge operate at a disadvantage. Fagan's study suggests that literacy is closely bound to local cultural traditions and settings.

Fingeret (1983) observed and interviewed 43 adults in an urban American city for the purpose of exploring the relationship between the social structures which they created and in which they lived their daily lives and the prevalent concept of marginally literate adults as dependent individuals. Fingeret's research methods relied on gaining a broad familiarity with participants in her study and in treating them with respect. She stated, "I asked these adults if they would teach me about their lives..." (p. 134). Fingeret's findings parallel those of Purcell-Gates, Elish-Piper and Fagan inasmuch as they affirm that marginally literate adults are little different from literate adults. Fingeret observes that many marginally literate adults not only take but also often give, and cosmopolitan marginally literate adults may develop and maintain extensive networks of reciprocal and symmetrical social relations the purpose of which is to protect their independence. Low literate adults have often been considered passive and dependent. Reliance on others has been seen as evidence of this dependence. Fingeret's findings highlight the mutuality of social networks of marginally literate adults and suggest that these networks and the adults involved in them are more competent and purposeful and less dependent than previously imagined. Fingeret's findings and Fagan's research also warn us that to consider literacy primarily in terms of success or failure as a means to socio-economic advancement, is to miss how literacy is actually used outside the mainstream society. Fingeret's reconsideration of social networks as evidence of marginally literate adults' complex participation in community life suggests that literacy may be seen not as the apex of competency but as one of many skills needed to negotiate everyday life.

The complexity, morality and labeling associated with being considered non-literate in a community was documented by Ziegahn (1992). She interviewed 27 individuals, who were seen within their community as poor readers, in order to examine and explore their attitudes toward literacy in relation to learning and toward participation in adult basic education programmes. Ziegahn found that the literacy learning goals of less experienced readers were generally unacknowledged. Community literacy goals that ensured the cultural hegemony of one class were accomplished by representing the process of becoming literate as a morality play in which the sin of illiteracy is "officially expunged" (Ziegahn, 1992, p.46). Ziegahn also concludes that marginally literate adults who have experienced problems learning to read and write in their early school careers dichotomize learning and literacy. Less accomplished readers are not necessarily poor or unmotivated learners. They are wary of literacy learning but are motivated to and may be skilled at learning related to practical and challenging applications. Ziegahn's findings support Fingeret's views and those of others such as Fagan, that literacy learning as distinct from learning for practical purposes is not necessarily a priority among adult readers.

Fingeret's interest in and respect for the capacity of marginally literate adults and her recognition of the importance of independence to them is evident in other studies. For example, in the programme which they studied, Malicky and Norman (1993) noted differences in retention patterns among the Canadian-born and immigrant respondents. Canadian-born participants were more likely to drop out of the programme than were immigrant students. The authors speculate that the experience and practical theory of Canadian-born participants about the power of education to change job prospects and life in general lead them to a more skeptical view of these programmes. In this finding, there is a hint that it is not literacy that is autonomous but the person who is doing the learning who is actively making decisions. In their study of reasons for participation in adult basic education programmes, Beder and Valentine (1990) also found both diversity and purposefulness in the choices made by marginally literate adults, including self-improvement, family responsibility and community involvement.

Ferdman's analysis (1990) extends our knowledge of the relationship between cultural identity and literacy, particularly in ethnically varied societies such as the US and Canada. He states that literacy is culturally defined and framed. Consequently, literate behaviour will be defined differently by individuals from different cultures. Ferdman concludes that culture and different definitions of literacy influence the way in which individuals go about learning to read and write.

Research from other perspectives and areas also contributes to the knowledge of marginal literacy. Ethnography as an approach to situating literacy has been criticized (Farella, 1993; Stuckey, 1991) for its imperialist and anti-experiential character. Nonetheless, it has helped us decentre dominant definitions of literacy and begin to understand what lies beyond the mainstream. Some of the anthropological literature acknowledges the situational complexity of literacy practices (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Scribner & Coles, 1981; Goody, 1968;). Bruner (1990), and other researchers working from within the constructivist perspective, recognize the social and the negotiated character of language practices. The ethnographic, anthropological and constructivist approaches as well as the growing body of research being undertaken from a sociocultural perspective have moved knowledge of low literacy beyond stereotypes and deficit models to an appreciation of the active role of literacy learners in creating their own literacy .

Critical Literacy Perspectives

The work of Fingeret, Heath, Purcell-Gates, Beder and Valentine and Ziegahn, among others has shifted the focus of adult education research from a deficit perspective to an appreciation of the resources and attitudes that low literate adults bring to the literacy learning process. Resistance Theory as elaborated by Giroux (1983) and applied by Quigley (1993) explains non-participation in adult literacy programmes as resistance rather than moral or intellectual failure. Quigley explores both the source of resistance to literacy learning and the nature of the learner's response to schooling. Like Ziegahn, he claims that adult literacy participation studies rarely consider the "voice" of adult respondents. He bases his approach on Giroux's conception of resistance as redefining "the causes and meanings of oppositional behaviour by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation" (Giroux, 1983, p. 289). Quigley analyzed data collected in interviews with twenty adults who had consciously chosen not to participate in an adult basic education programme. He found that domination and control of one's life were motifs that unified the categories of resistance that he established: Resistance for personal or emotional reasons, and resistance for ideological and cultural reasons.

The work, ideas and writing of Freire (1970a; 1985; 1978) have been seminal in the debate about the purposes of and approaches to adult literacy education. Freire's work in education is situated within the larger movement of "liberation theology" that developed in the context of Vatican II and the liberalization of the Roman Catholic Church. During this time, his ideas have undergone change and refinement. They continue to underpin the work of other scholars, such as Gee (1987; 1989; 1991), Purcell-Gates, (1995), Stuckey, (1991), Street (1984; 1992a & b), and Giroux, (1983; 1985a; 1987). Freire states an important perspective on how the challenge of inequality can be met: he recognizes how literacy and language are a reflection of dominant ideologies, serving to obscure the world rather than clarify it. Freire's response is to create a counter-ideology and a language with it to break the dominant ideology. For Freire, the world is changed when an individual is able to read it critically, that is, to differentiate, label and interpret it.

Stuckey's consideration of The violence of literacy (1991) cannot but require researchers to consider carefully the purpose of their own research and the socio-economic as well as cultural boundaries of literacy and what we have come to expect of it. For Stuckey, literacy education and literacy itself serve to perpetuate disparities in the interests of the holders of power. In her view, the most useful purpose of literacy is as a tool with which oppressed individuals may come to understand the nature of their oppression.

Street's work (1984) follows in the anthropological tradition and is a strong attempt to formulate a theory of literacy within a framework that acknowledges that literacy practices are the site of ideological struggle. He advances the propositions that the meaning of literacy depends on the social institution in which it is embedded, and that literacy can only be known to us in forms that already have social and political significance and cannot be separated from them. The particular reading and writing practices that are taught in any given place depend on the characteristics of the social structure of that place. For example, as Graff shows (1987) in Upper Canada in the nineteenth century, schooling was promoted as a means of social control over the population and this was the role that education played. Playing beneath the surface of this proposition and others in this theory is that literacy is always the subject of a struggle for power. Consequently, the processes through which a person learns to read and write contribute to the construction of meaning for the learner.

More recently, Street (1992a, 1992b) has elaborated and extended his theory. He develops the notion of literacy as an arena for the labeling dynamic in student-teacher relations or in UNESCO literacy/illiteracy campaigns. He also pushes into an area probed by Kerby (1991) and asserts that certain kinds of literacy practices are associated with particular, socially recognized ideas of personhood. He explores gender models of literacy in which he recognizes the construction of literacy and of gender as arenas of struggle. While Giroux and other theorists of resistance emphasize individual latitude for action within oppressive conditions, Street's research focuses on the political nature of literacy and the struggle for control of it among contending ideological perspectives.

Feminist Perspectives

Focused as it often is on gender difference and similarity, the feminist literature has contributed significantly to our understanding of literacy as "someone's" construction. Concern among women's groups about how women's voices are heard and about literacy among poor women has helped create both non-traditional literacy programming for women and research into the state of literacy among women. Some of this work has been sponsored by the Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women. In Something in my mind besides the everyday, Horsman (1990) interviewed 23 women in one rural county in Nova Scotia. The difference between the way in which these women view the promise of literacy and the reality of their literacy education highlights how literacy itself is not neutral and autonomous.

There have been a number of studies of the challenges faced by women in adult education and in their struggle to write the word and the world. Teeling (1990) and Brokop (1991) explore the meaning of learning in the lives of a number of women. Atkinson et al. (1994) have reported clearly on the dilemma of women living in poverty and trying to learn to read and write better. Violence is part of these women's lives. Many of these women are poor. They are hungry, homeless, sick, disabled. They live under stress. Many women are isolated. They fear how male relatives will react if they act to end their isolation.

Horsman's research is one example of an approach that focuses on particularity in exploration of diversity in the experience of literacy. Neilsen (1989) followed three people's literacy in Hubbards, Nova Scotia. She wrote:

> I learned quickly that I could not understand what being literate means until I understood the people with whom I was working. Looking at what they read and write would not be enough...I learned that I had to understand literacy from their perspective; I had to get inside their lives, inside the reading and writing they do. (p.1)

Purcell-Gates (1995, p. 9) describes the "myriad ways in which social, cultural, and cognitive factors influence the degree to which our schools, as they are configured today, are successful in transmitting literacy knowledge to children in a culturally diverse society." She does this by a detailed account of literacy in the life of Jenny and of her son Donny, against the immediate family and community background.

Post-structuralist Perspectives

The post-modernists and the hermeneutic approach (Brodkey, 1992; Collins, 1995) demonstrate that the meaning of words and ideas are not definable but derivable referentially. They contend that textual interpretation always involves an act of suppression in which, given the possibilities of resistance within dominant discourses (Foucault, 1980), that which is lost continues to "play" (Derrida, 1974) between the lines of an interpretation.

Collins (1995) uses Resistance Theory to try to explain patterns of educational failure in an elementary school where he has been observing and researching. He notes that resistance does not seem to be related to the amount of authority that a teacher has or uses. He believes that resistance is co-constructed and therefore is not solely understandable as opposition to authority. He also notes that libertory methods are not an automatic anecdote for resistance. He states his belief that equal participation and shared respect are the key ingredients in creating a positive classroom community.

Collins adopts a post-structuralist approach to the concept of resistance. He critiques the structuralist idea that there are underlying causes - deep structures - lurking behind resistance and their neglect of surface behaviour as a source and setting of resistance. He equates early studies that explain the deep structures as deviance (resistance as "bad") and more recent neo-Marxist structuralist research that accounts for resistance with reference to underlying economic forces (resistance as romantically "good"). He also critiques the tendency of structuralist studies to see resistance in terms of binary opposites. Collins believes that these studies, based on definitions of resistance that emphasize oppositional school behaviour which contests power and the significance of school culture in general and instruction in particular, present resistance as observed accounts of other's interpretation of motives rather than as enacted (analyzed from records of the event unfolding). He sees the situationally improvised and culturally constituted nature of particular events and the choices of particular persons as the proper source and focus of resistance and resistance research. He suggests discursive behaviour in the classroom as the focus of analysis to establish that student resistance, like compliance, is achieved through active co-construction and negotiation between teachers and students, and that resistance is the result of situated action, interaction and negotiation.

Community-based Literacy Programmes

The Centre which is the main context of Thomas' literacy learning is thought of by its coordinator and staff as a community-based literacy programme. Darville (1992) describes community-based programmes as showing great promise. These programmes often address the needs of particular groups, for example, urban native populations, the poor, women, and the disabled. Although there are fewer community-based programmes than programmes within the traditional institutional infrastructure, Darville notes that some sectors of the community-based movement have been studied. This is particularly so in the case of francophone programmes, projects for women's literacy and reports about aboriginal literacy programmes some of which are government sponsored (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. "You took my talk": Aboriginal literacy and empowerment, 1990). Like many projects that are in process, this literature is often prescriptive. It describes the nature of ideal programmes, reports experiments that work or have failed or addresses organizational issues related to efficient use of funding or elimination of jurisdictional bottlenecks (Darville, 1992, p. 28). The literature is aimed at communicating information to others who are interested in creating community-based programmes or in modifying existing programmes. There is little empirical or critical literature.

The work of Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) is a participatory study of community-based literacy. It includes a description of the principles of community-based literacy programmes and case studies of three programmes in Toronto. The case studies are structured as an evaluation of each programme based on adherence to or divergence from these principles. Practical problems are emphasized. There is little discussion about the more general social and ideological issues associated with adult literacy.

Demetrion's (1993) work is one of the few reports that examines community-based programming from a more academic stance. He explores a major point of ideological conflict in the implementation of programmes in participatory literacy programmes. He uses Fingeret and Jurmo's (1989) conceptualization of participatory literacy education as "active control, responsibility and reward" to explore problems of programme implementation. He points out that implementation is difficult in the absence of a participatory ethic among students, staff and sociocultural environment. Demetrion advocates pragmatic and "vigorous" staff leadership to help students develop their participatory ideas. It is difficult to escape the uncomfortable feeling that Demetrion's judgment with regard to the nature of the participatory ethic among students and his recommendations are influenced by his position as director of the community-based programme about which he writes.

Community-based programmes that are outside of institutional structures have been described (Darville, 1992) as exciting responses to the needs of specific needy groups. Although there is ample reporting about and from within these programmes, much of the reporting is about how to improve programmes. The uncertainty of funding and ideological stance on which many of these community-based programmes are founded make for uneasy relationships with ideologically opposed funding powers. This situation is not conducive to critical discussion and there are few empirical studies that examine community-based programmes.

Intergenerational Literacy

Thomas is both a husband and a father. When my study began, he had a son and a daughter. Since that time he has had a second son, adopted his wife's infant cousin and hosts his nephew on a long term basis. Thomas' son Brian (a pseudonym) turned six years old, entered kindergarten and then Grade One during the course of my research. Areas that are examined in this study include the family and intergenerational aspects of Thomas' literacy learning experience.

Tracey (1995) reports on a project synthesizing the professional literature on family literacy. Four hundred and nine abstracts were culled from the ERIC, RIE and CIJE databases, categorized and sorted. Influential articles were selected and read. Of the three categories of articles that were delineated, Tracey determined that approximately 19% were devoted to research. The greater part of the balance of articles were programme descriptions and position papers. An examination of research papers suggested that they are focused on specific rather than broad research questions. Further, Tracey contends that research in Family Literacy is focused on areas of investigation that are already well documented in other bodies of professional literature, for example, children's oral language and literacy development. She states that few studies examine programme effectiveness. A large number of position papers are said to target strategies for parental involvement in their children's literacy learning. Tracey concludes that the existing literature embodies an overly optimistic belief in the potential effectiveness of family literacy programmes.

Nikse (1990; 1993) defines family and intergenerational literacy as the view that educationally disadvantaged parents and children can be viewed as a learning unit and may benefit from shared literacy experiences. She points out that family and intergenerational literacy programmes are proliferating and promise to continue to do so in confusing array. In 1993, the US government invested approximately $48 million on 122 such programmes in spite of what Nikse estimates to be modest evidence of success. Nikse offers a typology of intergenerational literacy programmes according to key relevant components in order to provide a foundation for further research. These components include the target audience of the programme, whether both adult and child are present in the programme and the nature of the interaction, i.e. abstract direct (adults alone learning how to read to children) or concrete direct (children and adults together, reading at the programme site). The four part typology includes (1) parent child; (2) adult child; (3) adult alone; (4) child alone.

Hannon (1993) asserts that intergenerational literacy means primarily parental involvement in the literacy education of their children. He presents a framework for understanding the parental role and its possibilities. The framework is based on "three strands of early child literacy experience" (p.9). These are encounters with environmental print, early writing experiences (for example, drawing, playing), and shared book experiences. Hannon suggests that parents can model written language by, for example, writing notes to their children. Parents can provide literacy opportunities by having print in the home and by taking enriching trips as well as other similar activities. Parents can scaffold — structure — for their children so that the children remain independent but succeed in real literacy tasks. Finally, Hannon states that parents can provide recognition for the non-school literacy activities of their children. Among the major problems that he sees associated with this informal home and parent-based programme are the need for quality evaluative research on parent-child literacy interaction and the need to be aware of whose literacy we, as parents, are promoting.

Articles by Handel and Goldsmith (1989), Darling (1993), Daisey (1991), and Paratore (1993) are examples of descriptive reporting about intergenerational programmes. Handel and Goldsmith report and describe an intergenerational reading programme using children's literature. They contend that children's literature can contribute to adult literacy curriculum and to children's literacy.

Darling explains that the National Centre for Family Literacy views family as the best solution to complex socioeconomic and political problems. She emphasizes the value of intergenerational programmes as preventative measures. Darling reports on the implementation of Kenan model programmes. During 3 days each week at the programme site children get high quality preschool while parents work on basic skills. This is a full school year commitment. She also describes the Toyota Families for Learning Programme. She claims success for these programmes on the basis of findings that, for example, no children of participants in the programme were retained in their grade and that 90% of the classroom teachers of child participants rated the children as motivated. Darling also expresses optimism about the value of intergenerational programmes such as the ones described. Daisey presents a definition of intergenerational literacy as the tendency to pass on literacy abilities or the lack of them from parent to child. She uses this definition to develop a theoretical rationale for the Kenan model of combining adult education and early childhood education.

Paratore observed that even though there is a variety of literacy in most low-SES homes, home literacy was often unrelated to school literacy. She stated that there is little evidence that parent intervention results in greater benefits for children. Paratore's study examines the influence of an intergenerational approach to literacy on the reading and writing of parents and the incidence of the practice of literacy in home. She evaluated an intergenerational programme located in a small, transient, poor and immigrant community. The programme enrolled 367 adults during a three year period in which participants attended two hours each day for four days per week. Data sources included reading fluency, attendance, attrition and parent/child literacy interaction. This interaction was self-reported and collected weekly and consisted of the following indicators: number of selections read to child, read by child, and jointly read. Paratore concludes that such programmes are moving in promising directions.

Definitions of family and intergenerational literacy vary. This may reflect the lack of consensus on the content and purpose involved in working with a socially constructed concept such as literacy in the family and community context. The comments of Darling on the preventative character of the Kenan programme make explicit the inherent tendency to blame low-SES families for their marginal literacy and to express an optimism that is founded on the idea that motivation and government sponsored literacy programmes will correct the newly found deficit.

Summary

Two broadly different ways of understanding the cultural phenomenon of literacy have yielded different kinds of research. Literacy may be appreciated as an autonomous, universally accessible and unchanging "thing". Although this view may seem simplistic, it also embodies a powerful optimism about individuals and this may account for its tenacity. If the failure to read is an individual's responsibility and the barriers to participation in an appropriate programme can be identified, only the will to succeed is needed. From this perspective, every person is seen to have the capacity and the right to this commodity. The image of the literacy learner that emerges in this light is of an individual who must overcome difficulties related to his/her own background and shortcomings in order to qualify for acceptance into the circle of literacy.

Sociocultural and critical perspectives on literacy and on the deficit view focus on elucidating and documenting how it is that so many people from disadvantaged groups are labeled as deficient and fail to learn to read and write. Literacies are understood to be associated with socioeconomic and cultural groups. The legitimacy of literacies is related to their association with power in society. Change is seen as difficult. Literacy is understood as a reflection of power but without power itself. At its pessimistic extreme, the critical perspective may result in a romanticized portrayal of the marginally literate adult as a resister against systemic oppression. It is no easier to defend this view of the adult learner than it is to support the deficit view that responsibility for failure to learn to read and write is solely the fault of the learner.

The differences between these two ways of understanding low literacy and adult literacy learning are not necessarily significant. The deficit and positivist literature is founded on a definition of literacy that expresses the interests of dominant economic elites. The sociocultural and critical perspectives reflect the ideological values of intellectual elite groups. In neither case is the viewpoint of the adult learner expressed. Some studies, especially those of Purcell-Gates (1995), of Heath (1983) and of Rigg (1985), transcend the ideological battle for definition hegemony. They do so by focusing on individuals or small groups engaged in the everyday reality of learning to read and write. In part they accomplish their purposes by injecting into their research some passion for the struggle of their respondents with literacy in the world. On the other hand, the unsubstantiated promises advanced by the limited research on intergenerational literacy appear to be based on a mainstream understanding of literacy as it is believed to be enacted in the family, community and school.

Fingeret (1988) has called for ethnographic studies in adult education. The above review of the literature highlights the need for research that utilizes the focus and perspective of ethnography. While it is important to develop a conception of literacy based on individual experience, the perspective that is adopted is critical in this process. There is a need for studies that attempt to develop an understanding of literacy and the literacy learning experience that represent the viewpoint and the interests of adult learners. Ethnographic research and research in this spirit aim to construct a reasonable interpretation of people's worlds. It is this perspective that is largely missing from the literature on how to encourage success in adult literacy learning.

Chapter 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods that I adopted to explore the research questions posed in this study. I outline the characteristics of my methodology, discuss the preliminary study on which this study is built, explain how I gained access to the respondent, and explore my reasons for choosing Thomas as the sole respondent in the study. I document the procedures that I used to gather and analyze the data for the study. Finally, I state the measures used to support the trustworthiness of the research.

Methodological Characteristics of the Research

The approach that I chose to take to answer the question "What do learning to read and write and participation in a basic literacy programme entail for a marginally literate adult?" was to focus on the literacy learning life of one man. I attempted to understand his way of seeing, using and living with literacy.

The research questions, data gathering and analysis were informed primarily but not exclusively by an ethnographic approach to the topic. I have chosen to employ a modified ethnography, in the sense that I have combined it with a life history approach which allowed me to focus my attention quite specifically on Thomas' experiences. The ethnographic and life history methodologies were complemented by other perspectives which I adopted in response to the particular purposes and circumstances in which I was working. These approaches included a strong participant-observation component, a tendency to try to understand meaning phenomenologically, an action research stance, and a naturalistic and interpretive approach to the organization of the data.

Ethnographic Approach

I was attracted to ethnographic methods of inquiry because of my search for a means to learn about and communicate clearly the literacy experiences of those people who, as a consequence of their poverty and difference, are made silent and invisible. In addition, there is, from my point-of-view, another advantage to adopting an ethnographic means of inquiry — to look at the nitty-gritty of learning to read and write.

Definitions of ethnography vary (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Agar (1980) defines ethnography broadly as a comprehensive investigation of a social group. Spradley further specifies the goal of ethnography as "describing a culture" (Spradley, 1980, p. 3), the core of which is understanding a group's cultural interaction in terms of its own assigned meanings. The ethnographic component of the study is reflected in my approach to the research design and data collection. Firstly, my main aim has been to construct a reasonable sense of the meaning that Thomas assigned to the world of literacy that he was entering. Secondly, I attempted to do so by "living with" Thomas over a long period of time at the Centre and as a member of his community.

Life History Approach

The focus on one individual as a research subject is characteristic of the life history approach. Langness (1965) defines this approach as:

> ... an extensive record of a person's life as it is reported either by the person or by others or both, and whether it is written or in interviews or both. (Langness, 1965, 5)

An important concern for me in pursuit of answers to my research questions was to respect the experiences and the words of marginally literate people. Usually, these are people who, because they are poor, discriminated against or otherwise on the margins of mainstream society, are not at the table when issues that affect them are discussed and decided. Conventional positivist methods often do not account for the "deviants" and "failures" — the marginalized individuals who are usually those to whom we also refer as illiterate. Langness (1965, p. 27) points out that:

> The fact that many individuals behave in similar ways in similar situations may establish a culture pattern but it does not necessarily establish similar personalities, similar motivations, and similar meanings in all of the actors. It also says nothing of the deviants, who seldom get mentioned.

In focusing on the individual literacy of one person, the experiences of those who are seldom heard is magnified and given coherent form. If, as Spiro (Langness, 1965) writes:

> cultures and/or social systems do not lead an independent existence of their own; that their operation and maintenance are dependent to a marked degree on their internalization (either as cognitive or as affective variables) within the personalities of the members of society. (p.31)

and if

> institutions provide culturally approved and/or prescribed means for the satisfaction of personality needs, and these, in turn, provide the motivational bases for the performance of the members of society. (p.31)

then the life history offers an excellent approach to understanding the nature and meaning of literacy learning to a marginally literate adult.

Interpretive Approach

Positivist and interpretive approaches to researching educational questions continue to be the subject of debate among educational researchers (Anderson & West, 1995; Eisenhart, 1995; Mosenthal, 1995; Heap, 1995; Myers, 1995). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) observe that the researcher is a part of the world that she/he studies. They contend that since all social research is based on our capacity to observe and participate in society and community, we cannot avoid relying on commonsense everyday theory and methods of inquiry. The Positivist model that assumes an objectively available and measurable reality ignores the ultimate subjectivity and self-interest of the world.

Smith (1988, p. 22) argues for a relativistic understanding of knowledge creation based on an understanding of people as significance-making beings. He says:

> A formalized method, divorced from and designed to restrain our values, interests, and purposes, is not possible. The common thinking has been that lay accounts of the world, contaminated as they are by interests, purposes, and value are inferior to the methodologically driven accounts of social and educational inquirers... On the contrary, one can more appropriately conclude that no epistemological privilege attaches to the knowledge claims of professional inquirers; their claims are simply alternative accounts of our situation that must be placed alongside the accounts of for example teachers, parents, clients, and so on. This does not mean that the work of evaluators/researchers is of no value. Research and evaluation can be very important to the extent that they allow us to ask different questions of ourselves, to conceptualize things in different ways, and to use a different language to discuss our problems.

As Smith makes clear, interpretive approaches to social research are not necessarily more attuned to the reflexivity of the researcher than are positivist accounts. In this study, I have attempted to address this challenge by relying on the combination of approaches outlined in this chapter. Although the reality of Thomas' life with literacy may be our co-construction, it is I who wield considerable power as the writer of the report. There is no recourse from this power except the exercise by me of critical reflectivity and a similar stance by those who read the study and challenge it. The language of the study and terms consciously or unconsciously used are a starting point for recognition of undue bias. These terms can be challenged, reflected upon and/or bracketed (made problematical). In this way, researcher reflexivity can be made explicit.

Phenomenonological Approach

Van Manen (1992) describes the phenomenological research project as follows:

> I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, in such a way that we recognize this description *as a possible experience*, which means *as a possible interpretation* of that experience. This then is the task of phenomenological research and writing: *to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience.* (Author's italics) (p. 41)

My study has been guided by several characteristics of the phenomenological approach to human and social research. Firstly, in most methodological theory, writing is viewed instrumentally. Phenomenology is mindful of the role of the writing of research as an integral aspect of the exploration of the data, the researcher's learning process and the creation of the "findings." The writing of this study has been an important part of the creation of the interpretation presented in it. Secondly, phenomenology attends to understanding and communicating commonly held meanings of human experience. Van Manen (1992) refers to this way of doing research as being "addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like", (p.42). The challenge of truly understanding the experience of other people is impossible. Yet, it is among the most fundamental projects of social research, without which human research would be in large part pointless. My study is motivated and informed by the goal of communicating Thomas' experience of literacy learning. Finally, phenomenology does not ignore the role of emotion in the conduct of social research. Van Manen (1992) addresses the issue of emotion by linking it to the need to be open to the possibilities in our research questions. He writes:

> To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being. (p. 43)

In his reflections on a lifetime of anthropological research among the Navajo, Farella (1993) explored the consequences of research that pays no attention to living feelings. He described his attempt to document a Navajo ritual, the Night Chant, in which the whirling and flow of a river played a prominent part. He wrote:

> Against this backdrop of essential process, we anthropologists arrived to preserve this ceremony, to record it and place it in a vault somewhere so that it would never be "lost." We were there to build another dam, to take a world of movement and make it hold still, to embalm it. Even when the Navajo had forgotten it all, we would have it preserved in jars somewhere, forever.
>
> When you attempt to discover the world of others, you end up with a caricature of yourself. As a people we believe in things and we believe in these things as separate from and often instead of people and relationships. Knowledge

> is one of those things. It exists in books and even in vaults, or, better yet, in books in vaults in universities. When it is in minds, we still think of its as a thing, an artifact, not as something that is alive, that is moving and changing...and, of course, all of this shows that we weren't listening, that we had missed the point of the epistemology we were treating as an object. We were at this Night Chant in another attempt to transform the Navajo account of process into an entity that would last forever. (p.43-44)

The doing of the research reported in this document was in part an act of passion. I expressed the meaning of this passion in a readback of my field notes. I wrote:

> *Research means...*
> In January 1994, I wrote a piece for the Centre's Newsletter. This piece reflects two of the three themes that I have noted as important parts of my coming to knowledge. In the passage cited below, I talk about my changing understanding of "research,"
>
> When I first came to the Center in November 1993, it was to do some "research" for one of my professors. I thought that I would talk to some people (interview them) and then leave. It hasn't turned out that way. I still research. Now research has a new meaning. Before it meant discovering or finding something like a fact and taking it away to show to other professors and teachers. Now it means helping people in the Center. Together we learn about what is happening here. I hope that by trying to answer people's questions I can also teach them how to start doing their own research.
>
> For me, the creation of knowledge has not usually centred on the knowledge created but also often on the means by which it comes to be. So, questioning the purposes of the act of research is not earth shaking. The significance here for me is in the feeling that research is an act, not a transparent, passive receiving. Being an act, I see that I express a choice and preference to act among and with the people in the Centre. I would like to characterize this movement at this point as an opening up on my part to the "students," beginning to see and understand them as full people rather than as one dimensional "students."

Action Research Approach

My passionate involvement at the Centre included an action research orientation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981) to my time and work there. I found, during the course of the field work, that I had become more and more emotionally responsive to the many humiliating and exploitative tentacles of poverty that plagued and hounded the students at the Centre, to the discrimination that dogged many of the native students and to the physical abuse that haunted many of the women who attended the Centre.

I viewed action in the research setting as a source of understanding for me and for the questions that I sought to ask and to answer. At the Centre I was not only the researcher for my own study but also a teacher. As a teacher, I tried to listen to and understand the social, economic and political needs of my students and to help them articulate these needs in the direction of democratic action. During the time that I was conducting my research several political developments were influencing the lives of many Centre students. In 1993, a Progressive Conservative government had been elected in province. This government took as its main purpose the reduction of the provincial debt and yearly budgetary deficits. An important aspect of its attempt to achieve these goals was to curtail spending on social programmes, and in particular to reduce the number of Social Welfare recipients and the monthly assistance allowance. Many Centre students were welfare recipients. Fear and increased financial hardship were common experiences among these students at that time. In 1994, the municipal, provincial and federal governments agreed to support construction of a new concert hall in the city. The site chosen for the concert hall was the old courthouse building which housed the Centre. There was much apprehension among students about the fate of the Centre, especially when it became apparent that the Co-op was having difficulty finding a new location for itself.

The participatory nature of my research at the Centre consisted of the following: (1) I helped the efforts of some students at the Centre to gain support from politicians by inviting them to visit the Centre. We wrote letters to Members of the Legislative Assembly. We delivered the letters to the offices of the MLAs. We hosted those who responded favourably to the invitations; (2) When labour unions organized demonstrations against government social policy, I was among staff and students from the Centre who joined other individuals and groups who marched on the Legislature to assert opposition to government policy; (3) When the municipal government was in the process of deciding on the disposition of the Co-op building, I worked with students to help them understand and express their feelings about the situation, and when the mayor agreed to a financial arrangement with the owner of a professional hockey team to keep it in the city, I wrote and sent a fax copy of a letter to the mayor protesting the expenditure of money on a hockey team when there was a great need to address the poverty of great numbers of citizens; (4) I helped men at the Centre to organize a Men's Group after two men approached me to do so. The Men's Group addressed a broad range of questions and issues, some of which were social and political in nature, including spousal abuse, alcoholism, powerlessness, welfare and poverty.

The Initial Study

Some studies emphasize the positive elements in adult literacy learning by setting out to find and document success factors. The study which I used as the initial investigation for the work reported in this document had as its purpose to build a model of the successful student participant in an adult basic education programme.The initial study aimed to identify the features of people's home lives, community and school that supported their learning and the way that they learn to learn. The study explored some positive areas in an otherwise distressing landscape from which large numbers of people flee in disillusionment, often without having come to grips with the "learning" and "print literacy" that is offered in adult basic education programmes. My primary role in this study was to gather data through observation and interviews. The study has been published as "Literacy learning in a community-based program" in Adult Basic Education (Malicky, et al., 1997).

This initial research yielded lessons and information in five areas that affected the conduct of my study. These areas are choice of topic, access to the site, choice of respondent, acceptance in community, and approaches to interviewing.

First, the study provided me with a view of marginally literate adults that encouraged me to question my assumptions about the nature of literacy. The study emphasized the strengths of marginally literate adults as these strengths relate to literacy learning. The study proceeded from a sociocultural perspective in assuming that context and environment are critical elements in literacy learning. A more detailed picture of the potential and the complexity of the life of adult learners emerged from this initial study. Another theme that was elaborated in the study was the importance to adult literacy students of empowerment over their own lives. This was expressed in the uncomfortable co-existence of many students' personal goals together with the aim of community building and an emphasis on group decision-making that was promoted at the Centre. This theme echoes the challenge that Demetrion (1993) describes in his study of the Bob Steele Adult Centre. The preliminary study contributed to the problematization of my understanding of marginal literacy.

Second, the study provided me with initial access to the site for my study. The privilege of conducting research at the Centre is determined by the Centre board on the recommendation of the coordinator on the basis of her estimation of the value of the research to the Centre and its students. The study offered me the opportunity to observe at the Centre and to talk with students and thereby gain the beginnings of an interpretation of the nature of that community. I came to be known by the people at the Centre. With a preliminary understanding in place, I was able to develop research questions and a research stance that reflected not only my interests but also the interests of the Centre community. As a result of my work at the Centre, the Board of Directors felt comfortable allowing me to conduct my research at the site.

Third, the study allowed me to survey members of the Centre community and begin the process of finding one individual who would meet my research criteria and who would consent to participate in the study. The study included two interviews with each of five individuals, some of whom were male and some female. Thomas was one of the respondents in the initial study. I interviewed him twice for the study. This allowed me to get to know him. Perhaps more important, he was able to familiarize himself with me.

Fourth, I was able to gain initial acceptance as a non-threatening presence among students at the Centre. The study required me to spend time at the Centre as an observer. In this capacity and for the purposes of interviewing respondents, I spent more than the allotted time at the Centre. Sometimes, agreed upon times for interviews could not be kept by the student respondents. At other times, my help was solicited to complete small projects. For example, on my second visit to the Centre I was asked by one of the respondents in the study if I could help him to put up Halloween decorations. Many of the students at the Centre are poor. They feel put upon by landlords, police and social workers. Many adult students reported negative early school experiences that left them suspicious of teachers. The pilot study allowed me to determine whether I was suited to research in this social context. It allowed members of the student community to decide whether they were willing to trust me among them.

Fifth, the study allowed me to practice my interviewing strategies and skills and to adapt them and my understanding of the limitations and possibilities of interview-based research to the individuals at the Centre and to the demands of the research that I proposed to conduct. From the study, I learned that scheduling interviews was an uncertain process and required flexibility. I found that students were often reluctant to respond to questions and that occasionally responses were designed either to joke with me or to put me off of sensitive subjects and attitudes. I learned when to persist with a question and when to retreat.

The full import of the initial study in the scheme of my study cannot be overestimated. My participation in initial study at the Centre was serendipitous in the sense that it was unrelated to the Centre or any research problem or need that existed there. I came to the Centre as a graduate research assistant to conduct field work for a study undertaken by someone other than myself. In this context, the initial study served a number of useful purposes. Foremost among them was that it provided me with experience on the basis of which I decided that the Centre and its community presented questions that I wished to pursue. The initial study also influenced the means through which data were gathered.

Access to the Respondent

The nexus of the study and its main site was the Centre. In the Autumn of 1994, when it reopened after the summer break, I returned to the Centre as a teacher, contract researcher for a peer tutoring project and to undertake research toward my doctorate. During the time which I spent at the Centre I met, taught, tutored, talked with, befriended and was befriended by more than fifty people — students, women and men. Many of them signed Consent Forms and were informants and participants but not respondents in this research. Some of their words, thoughts and ideas are recorded at one place or another in this study. As I refined my own research purposes and questions during this time, my interest and attention focused increasingly on Thomas. I observed Thomas live his life and undertake to develop his literacy. The interpretation that I had presented in my earlier paper (Katz & Malicky, 1994) could not account for the directions that Thomas' life with literacy was taking or, as I came to know more of it, for the complexities of his daily life, the gloss on events that he gave as we conversed, and his literacy practices.

Many of the women who attend the Centre have had difficult and abusive relations with men. They are suspicious of men and this suspicion, discomfort and distrust extended to me, particularly when I first came to the Centre. I was among the very few male tutors, teachers and workers at the Centre. For long periods during my research, I was the only man on staff. Some activities, such as a bicycle repair clinic that I organized, attracted almost exclusively male students. I became friends with many of the men at the Centre.

Within a few months of beginning the research, I began to focus my attention on some of these men. Thomas was a student at the Centre when I first came there at the end of October 1993. We met a few days after I first arrived. At that point, he had been attending the Centre programme for about one year. The empirical work of the initial study included intense discussions with three men and extensive conversations with and observations of other students at the Centre, particularly with some of the other men students. Thomas was among three men whom I interviewed for the initial study. The stories which two of these men told me about their relationship with literacy were very different from my own experience with reading and writing. Unfortunately, these two men left the Centre within a few months. One of these men decided to return to a rural life in the north of the province to escape a gambling addiction. The other man claimed to have found a job in another city. He left the Centre and did not return.

Thomas and I have developed a many-sided relationship. He has been a student in at least five groups with which I worked at the Centre including two reading groups, a spelling class, a peer tutoring project that is now in its third year, workshops about Paired Reading, academic preparation, and the Men's Group. We became friends and met for coffee, on occasion, at his favourite donut shop, at restaurants near the Centre, for lunch, and at my house. We live only about ten blocks apart. We carted rotted fence wood to the city landfill in the back of his truck and we dug post holes for a new fence that I was building, one miserably cold and wet Saturday. I tutored him individually, consulted with him about his computer, and supported his efforts to fill out government forms and write letters to government agencies. With my wife, I have taken his two young children swimming. With his agreement and cooperation, I have followed Thomas around, observed him and interviewed him. We have conversed on an ongoing basis for the past two years.

Why Thomas?

The design of the study was not built around the idea of generalizability of the data. It advanced from the naturalistic, ethnographic and phenomenological proposition that, metaphorically, "all of life is found in each grain of sand." The objective is to build our knowledge by accumulating individual "cases." Rather than generalize from a representative sample, I chose to gather detailed data about one instance or person. In this sense, Thomas' presence at the Centre was warrant enough to choose him or anyone else there who was a student as the subject of the study.

Thomas is one of the more articulate students at the Centre. I see his capacity to be articulate as having four dimensions. First, there is an adequate amount of talk from Thomas. He doesn't necessarily speak often or loudly. He speaks quite regularly and can be counted on to add his views to a discussion. At the Centre, discussion is not to be taken for granted. Many people come to the Centre in a fragile state, often determined to succeed where they feel they have previously failed. Nonetheless, they are hesitant. People's school experiences have often been unpleasant. Women especially, and particularly native women say that they have been taught to remain silent in public conversations and discussions. Sometimes, discussions are dominated by the tutor/teacher. On other occasions, one student, usually a man, will talk long and loud. Thomas speaks when he feels he has something to say.

Second, Thomas' comments were understandable. Many students who spoke, either in private or in public, did so only briefly and in a fragmented way. On more than a few occasions, responses were off the topic or were difficult to understand. Thomas spoke with consistency and clarity and his talk, either in response to questions or as a participant in the dialogues, was most often clearly related to the topic or conversation. He could be counted on to hold up his end of the conversation.

Third, other students and staff listened to his words. There was a reaction to what Thomas said. Finally, Thomas usually spoke personally. He often used stories to particularize his communications. Many students spoke in general terms. The "I" was seldom used and talk was made abstract. Thomas' communications revealed more of a person than I felt was realizable from the data that I collected from other individuals.

These explanations beg the question, what constitutes "choosing" Thomas as a participant in the study? How does one choose? Formally, I presented him with a Consent Form (See Appendix B), explained it to him, asked him to look it over and asked an independent third party (in this case the Centre coordinator) to read it to him and discuss it with him before he decided to sign it or not. In another sense, we chose each other. We became friends, as I tutored him and as we found common interests. It is this friendship that allowed me to find the characteristics for which I was looking. In this sense of reciprocity, I too am a participant in Thomas' project. He calls upon me when information is needed or when he has to do something that he feels unable or unwilling to do on his own and for which he categorizes me as an appropriate resource. He calls upon me to discuss issues of urgency in his life. He explains, he listens, he draws his conclusions and he acts upon them no differently than I do, yet completely differently.

Procedures

The study relied primarily on participant observation and interviewing procedures to gather the data with which to address the question posed. I observed Thomas at the Centre and outside of it. Most observation and interviewing took place at the Centre. The Centre operated daily from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday from the beginning of September to mid June. It was closed for two weeks at Christmas and at Easter. I attended at the Centre during most operating hours. During most of the field work stage of the study and afterwards, I taught at the Centre for six hours each week. During some semesters, I instructed for three hours each week. In addition, I devoted a number of hours each week to documenting the progress of the Peer Tutoring Project. At other times, I observed Thomas, interviewed him, worked and conversed with him. Field work totaled approximately 1500 hours at the Centre. I also observed and worked with Thomas outside of the Centre. These observations occurred in his home, at his invitation as well as when we were involved in joint projects such as the purchase of wood with which to build a bicycle rack for the Centre, when I was invited to the birthday party of one of his children or when Thomas called me in an emergency for medicine for his son or to help him with a computer problem.

Stages of Data Collection

Field Work Phases One and Two

The field work stage of the study consisted of three phases. During the first phase of field work, my aim was to gain competence in understanding the rules, culture and meanings of the Centre as an organization and as a community of students and staff. Simultaneously, I was searching for questions that would constitute a researchable project in the sense that it would be related to existing academic literature and interests and would be anchored in goals or needs of people at the Centre. In the second stage of the study, I searched for themes that would approximate what I believed to be Thomas' understanding of reading and writing and how best to express this understanding as a set of themes.

During the first two phases of field work, I wrote field notes on a daily basis. Initially, field notes were recorded by hand mostly on the left hand side of each page. These notes were made during the course of observation. Respondents and other students at the Centre were welcome to read these notes at any time and to comment on them when they wished to do so. In the late afternoon or evening of each day, I reread the day's notes and expanded them with observations and reflective comments. These expanded notes were written in the right hand column of each page. I reread my field notes continually as I looked for cultural rules and knowledge and to gain an understanding of aspects of Thomas' life as I recorded and pondered it. Periodically, I prepared written readbacks of my field notes. The purpose of the readbacks was to learn through writing. These readbacks were reflective summaries of grouped notes. This reflection involved re-reading the material and writing a reaction to my re-reading in which I tried to interpret and locate what I had written in the journal in terms of my current understanding of what I was studying and where it was leading me. A second strategy was used to gain familiarity with the field notes and to coax thematic meaning from them. This consisted of a guide to the field notes which was periodically revised to reflect new expansions and to map the progress and direction of my observations.

The first two phases of the research made use of a periodic sweep observation technique which I labeled Literacy Audits to amass data. These audits consisted of recording descriptions of all the literacy events and as many of the literacy practices as I could gather from observing and talking with people, at a given moment in time at the Centre. Sampling was done on a random basis over a period of a few weeks. I would position myself so that I could observe the whole room. Because I was an accepted member of the Centre community, my presence was not obtrusive or noticeable. I recorded point by point who was doing what in the room. Then, I approached each observed person and asked him/her what he/she was doing in order to check my observation (often enough, what I thought I was observing was different from what the person involved was doing and saw him/herself as doing), and to provide a basis for a more detailed description of the event and of any aspects of his/her practice that were not observable and which he/she could and would share.

In addition to unscheduled visits at Thomas' home and with his family, I undertook a series of Focused Observations of Thomas' daily life. These were detailed recordings of my observations of a day in the life of Thomas for the purpose of contextualizing his literacy learning and to determine his everyday literacy practices. I approached Thomas and received his permission to meet with him at 8:00 a.m. at his home and to accompany him and record his actions during the day and until late in the evening. I did this on two different dates within a period of approximately two months in the Spring of 1995.

My field notes were contained in two large binders and totaled 517 pages of handwritten and typed entries. Binder 1 included daily field notes consisting of approximately 107 separate entries varying in length, totaling 276 handwritten pages. In addition to field notes, Binder 1 included observations for the peer tutoring project and for the initial study (Malicky, et al., 1997) for the period November 1993 through June 1994. A second field note binder consisted of 241 pages of notes prepared on a laptop computer using the same procedures as outlined above for collection of field notes. These notes cover the period from September 1, 1994 to the end of December 1995. In total, the field notes to this time cover a 21 month period at the Centre.

In addition, during the period January to June 1996, I interviewed Thomas on a number of occasions in order to check some of my data and to test some of my interpretations with him. In addition to transcribed and non-transcribed interviews, audiotaped meetings and writing samples (for example, Thomas' autobiography and his journal), the Field Notes constitute a major source of data for this study. They represent the anchor of my experience of the Centre. Field note material is not cited directly in the body of the study. Rather, it is woven into the document.

During the course of the field work phase of the study, I maintained a diary. This diary was both a day-timer and an aide memoire. It was used to record events and impressions both in anticipation and after-the-fact. For example, if I made an arrangement with Thomas to interview him or to ask him to take some time to complete a questionnaire, I would ask him several days in advance about his willingness to do so and about his availability. If he agreed to complete the questionnaire or respond to my questions, we would establish a date and a time that he felt was feasible. I recorded this information in my diary. The procedure was similar for other tasks such as a request by Sarah — a pseudonym for the Centre Co-ordinator — that I work with two students on a letter to other literacy groups or to remind myself that a general meeting would take place on a specified date. I also examined my diary in retrospect at least twice weekly. I reviewed the entries in the diary, adjusting their timing or description in light of events that had occurred. For example, if Thomas had not come to the Centre on the day that we had set aside for the hypothetical interview cited above, but had appeared the next day and if we had conducted the interview at that time, a notation in my diary would have been made showing that the event had taken place on the next day. In addition to anticipatory notes and post-event adjustments to them, I added notes to the diary to fill in, list and briefly describe the content of my days at the Centre, including unanticipated actions and involvement on my part. The diary records the things that I did and the amount of time that I devoted to many of these engagements at the Centre.

Lesson Plans were a form of field note that was prepared in relation to reading programmes which I taught and in which Thomas was a participant. The field work phase of the study took in my participation in the life of the Centre. One element of this participation was teaching. During the 21 months that I was conducting the initial research and the direct field work for this study, I was also teaching classes of students. These classes were all related to reading, and peripherally to writing with the exception of the Men's Group which was only indirectly related to literacy education. The philosophy of the Centre stresses student centredness. Regardless of the pressure exerted by this approach, I found that the role of teacher with adults who brought to the class diverse and fascinating life histories and educational experiences demanded thoughtful and sometimes torturous preparation. Thomas was a student participant in all of the classes for which I was the teacher or animator. The lesson plans that I prepared for the purpose of helping the students in my classes to learn about their own literacy and to master some elements of mainstream literacy constitute a description of one of the contexts in which Thomas and I lived and interacted. These plans also recorded some of Thomas' actions as a literate person and as a literacy learner. Further, they reflected my feelings and attitudes toward Thomas as a student and about the nature of adult learning and literacy.

Field Work Phase Three

In the third phase of field work, I focused attention on gathering data related to Thomas' participation practices in literacy learning in and outside of the Centre, to his uses of reading, his engagement with writing and with computers, and his relationship with his son in the context of literacy learning. In addition to the data gathering procedures outlined above, approximately ten hours of videotape were recorded. This includes primarily videotape of peer tutoring group meetings in which Thomas participated, individual tutoring sessions in which he was a tutor, group work, and workshops.

Interviews were used to learn about Thomas' attitudes toward literacy and about his view of his literacy learning (Spradley, 1979). Interviews included an initial peer tutor interview, a Peer Tutoring attitude interview on December 5, 1994, and two interviews in May and June 1995 about his attitude toward the reading and writing course which he had taken. The interviews were usually conducted in a quiet corner of the large and public room at the Centre. They usually lasted no longer than 30 minutes. Approximately 50 hours of audiotapes were recorded. These include interviews with students other than Thomas about their participation in Centre programmes and about their lives and experiences with literacy, peer tutoring between students other than Thomas, Men's Group meetings, and recordings of student talk while clustered around a computer screen trying to solve a problem. Some of this material was used to construct Chapter Four in which the background of the Centre is presented. Selected sections of these tapes were transcribed. Other sections were reviewed aurally when needed. Selection of interview segments to be transcribed was based on my evolving interpretations of the data and corresponding interest in examining some of Thomas' statements more closely.

I recorded and maintained a list of the books that Thomas read. These data were used to explore Thomas' attitude toward reading and his use of it in his daily life and in relation to his goals. The material may be described as stories about aboriginal peoples, a collection of Inuit legends, stories about the forest and the wilds, fairy tales, and humourous stories as well as some short stories and anthologies of poetry, sales brochures, government forms and computer manuals. A list of books read by Thomas is included in Appendix E.

I collected samples of most of Thomas' written work in order to understand better his involvement with written communication and his evolution as a writer. These samples include edited and unedited letters to government departments, edited articles for the Centre Writer and the Centre Newsletter, a seven page unedited autobiography, a journal, advertisements to sell dogs and to buy computer parts, numerous email and fax messages, and some informal notes to me.

There are 20 items included in the writing collection of Thomas' work which I examined. The series of 39 email messages transmitted between Thomas and me, of which 22 were sent by him to me, are included here as one item. They have been analyzed as one but are also taken into account as writing production stretching over a period of nine months between 1995 and 1996. Not included is work on which he collaborated (three pieces) and very brief or cryptic notes that he wrote.

Of the 20 items in this writing collection, 13 are edited, six are unedited drafts and in one case an edited and an unedited copy are available. Thomas usually submitted his unedited work to Sarah for review. I frequently observed her engaging him in dialogical learning about editing. For example, she would begin by asking Thomas to underline all the words in his essay that he thought were spelled incorrectly. The editing process in which Thomas was involved was little different from the standard procedures in publishing, dissertation writing or in "Writer's Workshops" process found in some schools. Editing did not alter the elements of topic, form and quantity.

Writing that predated my attendance at the Centre was culled from back editions of The Writer and The Newsletter and from material that Thomas gave me. I am confident that I gathered most of what Thomas wrote between November 1993 and December 1995. I completed my work at the Centre in December 1995. Consequently, my collection of Thomas' writing for 1996 is not full or consistent because, although we continued to have contact, it was not always at the Centre or in a learning context. On the other hand, his 22 email messages began in June 1995 and continued to the end of March, 1996. Of the 22 messages, three were sent in 1996 and nineteen in 1995. Again, this reflects a general decline in our contact. A detailed listing of samples of Thomas' writing is included in Appendix F.

Data for exploration of intergenerational literacy were gathered through interviews with Thomas, field notes that recorded my observations of his use of family oriented literacy facilities such as public libraries, family interaction over books, interviews with Thomas' son's teacher, the principal of his son's school, observation of his son during a morning at school, and examination of the materials used by the volunteer tutor who worked with his son during the morning on which I observed him in school.

Data Analysis

This study deviates from a strictly ethnographic approach in the way in which the main themes of the research were derived. The categories of thought and meaning that are developed in ethnographic research usually derive through repeated, step-by-step readings and procedures such as domain, taxonomic and componential analysis which are designed to allow cultural categories to emerge from the data (Spradley, 1980). In Domain analysis, for example, the researcher identifies social situations and attempts to assign cultural meanings to them (the "Definition of the Situation"). I do not believe that these procedures eliminate or suppress researcher cultural subjectivity. Neither do I believe that, under participant observation conditions, it is the researcher whose subjectivity dominates. Rather, I worked with the assumption that the reality that is created in the research situation is a co-construction belonging to both researcher and respondent. While the definition of the situation as it occurs and is understood and accepted by participants in it may be jointly negotiated, much of the power of giving meaning to events rests with the researcher who writes the account. In this study, the themes, categories and meanings that I brought to the study were part of the negotiation of meaning that emerged in the evolution of my relationship with Thomas.

The collection of data and its analysis overlapped. Each informed the other. The four main themes that are stated and explored in Chapter Five were developed through close and continual reading and rereading of Field Notes, interview transcripts, records of meetings and material read and written by Thomas. The themes emerged over a period of about one year. During this time they were repeatedly reintroduced to Thomas to check their validity and for the purpose of further expanding their meanings.

Data collected on each of the four themes were explored using theoretical and conceptual tools. Initially, the early data were analyzed using Giroux's formulation of Resistance Theory (1983). When I found Resistance Theory inadequate to account for variation in Thomas' participation and attitudes, Fingeret's (1983) conceptualization of dependence and independence and the related idea of support networks were applied to account for Thomas' differential participation in formal and informal activity. The analysis of the accumulating data was not linear. I found myself returning to aspects of Resistance Theory to explore some parts of the data and rejecting their use in other instances. I found that the analysis of data gathered in relation to Thomas' participatory practices in literacy learning was profitably structured by Jurmo's conceptualization of participation in adult basic education programmes in terms of degrees of reward, responsibility and control (Jurmo in Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989). Application of these concepts to the data suggested a mutually exclusive dichotomy between formal and informal literacy activity in Thomas' life. Specific activities in which Thomas was involved were assigned to these two categories based on the degree to which they approximated Jurmo's criteria.

In order to determine what kinds of materials Thomas read, a list of materials which Thomas read was developed and maintained over time. As his tutor and teacher in a number of reading classes, I was familiar with most of the material which Thomas read. The list of items was then reviewed and categorized according to genre and purpose. Four mutually exclusive categories emerged from this process.

Text complexity was determined by application of the Fry Readability Scale (Vacca & Vacca, 1996) to a number of books that I had witnessed Thomas reading. Neither interest nor background knowledge about the subjects of the books read was taken into account except inasmuch as subjects varied and items used were chosen by the researcher rather than by Thomas. Text complexity was also approached descriptively using the Bargainfinder as a sample of Thomas' reading. A copy of the Bargainfinder was bought and the researcher set himself the goal of finding ads for dogs being given away and for computer parts. These were two areas in which Thomas was interested and which he stated that he often searched when using that publication. Notes were maintained as I proceeded step-by-step to locate these sections and columns in the Bargainfinder. The recorded notes reveal the path followed to reach the goal and the complexity inherent in the actions needed to locate these ads.

In order to construct a description of Thomas' view of himself as a reader, I gathered all available statements that Thomas had made to me and that I had recorded either in my field notes or on audiotape of interviews or in recordings of activities and meetings in which Thomas had participated. These quotes were listed, read and reread in an attempt to isolate possible categories as to how Thomas viewed himself as a reader.

Thomas' written work was arranged chronologically and grouped by year to uncover a path or paths of development or change if any and when and if changes were associated with other developments in his life. An analysis of his writing was then done to determine the topic of each piece and to examine patterns in the quantity and the kind of writing Thomas was doing. The meaning of writing to Thomas was determined in a manner similar to that used to specify Thomas' view of himself as a reader. His statements about writing and about himself as a writer were isolated and categorized according to kinds of content. Categories were initially identified and modified with the addition of new material.

An analysis of Thomas' written work was undertaken to construct an understanding of how Thomas saw himself as a writer. To explore the kind of writing in which he was involved, I categorized his writing using Britton's and Graves' conceptualization of forms of writing. The model of the writing process developed by Britton (1970) is based on the idea of the "stance" or "voice" of the writer. Britton has defined voice or stance as encompassing the purpose, audience, and function of the writing. He delineated three voices, expressive, poetic and transactional, as well as a combined voice which he referred to as transitional. Graves (1983) conceptualized writing as including six different forms. These are Narrative, Expressive, Informative, Persuasive, Descriptive, and Poetic. In order to establish a measure of the accuracy and consistency of my classification of Thomas' writing, I compared the classifications arrived at using Graves' and Britton's approach and revised where divergences were apparent. I used measures of quantity, topic chosen and themes of the pieces that Thomas wrote as well as the audience, function and purpose reflected in these pieces to draw inferences about how he sees himself as a writer.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) address the issue of the legitimacy of qualitative research procedures by stating three criteria for demonstrating the trustworthiness of data and analysis. These criteria are credibility, confirmability and transferability. The credibility of the themes developed in this study was established primarily, but not exclusively, through member checking. I frequently presented my understanding of his literacy learning experiences to Thomas during the field work phases of the study and afterwards, when I focused more intensively on analysis of the data. The complexity of Resistance Theory and my doubts about some of its tenets led me to probe Thomas' views of his own actions. Member checking led me to modifications in my use of Resistance Theory. This is confirmed by the changes that are evident in my initial interpretation of Thomas' literacy learning and the interpretation presented in this thesis. Alvermann et al. (1996) accepts the value of member checks but caution against relying too heavily on them because the checks themselves affect the member's attachment of meaning to events and acts. A second source of credibility for the analysis of the data is the length of time which I spent at the Centre and my own membership in the Centre community. My position within the community allowed me legitimately to compare Thomas' reaction to the themes presented to him with my own experience at the Centre.

Confirmability and prevention of interpretive bias were acknowledged through use of triangulation and knowledgeable readers. Triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources. My research made use of three main sources of data. These were field notes, interviews, and samples of material read and written. Each of these data sources was developed fully and independently. Where necessary, comparisons were made to ensure consistency and accuracy. A copy of the study proposal and an early version of the introductory chapter of the thesis were read and commented upon by Sarah, the Centre coordinator. Draft copies of the study, including background and findings chapters, were read by two individuals who were knowledgeable in related disciplines. Feedback resulted in at least one major change in the understanding of findings on Thomas' involvement in the literacy learning of his son.

Because this study particularizes its pursuit of questions posed rather than seeking to generalize from the data, transferability is not of prime concern. Nonetheless, transferability of the study was addressed through the provision of a background chapter. Chapter Four of the thesis provides detailed information on important variables in relation to the Centre and Thomas and comparative material on Thomas and other men who comprise his peer group at the Centre, as well as individual portraits of other students. This material allows the reader to judge the correspondence between this study and other contexts.

Quantitative and qualitative researchers must deal with the question of representation. Writers of research are continually interpreting (representing) versions of the data, which, themselves, are often earlier interpretations. Some people have suggested that the researcher has no greater claim to legitimacy than any other observer, except the establishment of a claim to a reasonable intepretation of phenomena (Alvermann et al., 1996; Lather, 1992; Smith, 1988). In light of the pervasiveness of interpretation, I view my own text as well as that of others as incomplete constructions.

Summary

At different times I had different roles at the Centre. At the start, I saw myself as a researcher performing in the traditional detached way. I had come to interview study respondents. I had no plans to "get involved" at the Centre. The need to ask a researchable and significant question guided my stance toward my involvement at the Centre and the methodological perspective that I adopted. The initial study provided experience that guided methodological and procedural choices as well as access to Thomas as the respondent in this study. A broad and modified understanding of ethnography supported my research questions and data gathering efforts. An appreciation for the concerns of a phenomenological view of human research directed my attention and efforts toward participatory research involvement and to the use of writing as an analytic tool of the research. An interpretive stance helped me to deal with thorny issues of subjectivity. At all times, I tried to anchor my methodological choices in the requirements of the people who were at the centre of the study and in the possibilities of the site and the events that comprised a large part of the data of the study.

The main sources of data for this study were Field Notes, reading and writing samples and audiotapes of interviews and meetings in which Thomas participated. Participant observation was the basis for the Field Notes and for variants of them, including focused observation of Thomas' daily life and literacy audits of activity at the Centre. Analysis was conducted concurrent with data collection and in relation to the four major themes that emerged from continuous immersion in the data. Data were categorized and explored using concepts from the literature on participation, resistance and networks.

Chapter 4

THOMAS AND THE CENTRE COMMUNITY

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter my purpose is to describe the Centre, the lives of its community members and, in particular, Thomas and his involvement within this community. I explore the structure and practice of adult education at the Centre and link these elements to ideological principles of community-based literacy programmes. I examine and interpret the history of the Centre and describe some of the people who have decided to study there and the way in which their learning is organized. I locate Thomas as a student within the Centre community, in his family and within broader society and I discuss Thomas' decision to return to school.

Principles and Practices of Community-based Programming at the Centre

Background to Community-based Literacy Programmes

Adult education programmes, the aims of which include helping adults to learn to read and write or to improve their literacy skills, come in a variety of forms in Canada. Traditionally, they have been offered by and housed within public school systems or other government agencies. Darville (1992) dates the beginning of modern and systematic approaches to adult literacy in Canada to the Basic Training for Skill Development programme (adult pre-vocational academic preparation), a component of the Canada Manpower Training Programme sponsored by the Federal government during the mid-1960s. He cites the close ties between public school systems and the delivery of adult literacy initiatives in the Maritime provinces. In Western and Central Canada community colleges were more active in offering adult basic education in communities.

Some programmes deliver instruction in the form of one-on-one tutorials, at places and times convenient to both tutor and student, for example, in the student's home. Other programmes offer curriculum in a more traditional and structured school/classroom setting. In many programmes, the underlying conceptions of knowledge and purpose embody a "transmission" model of learning and of skill in which tutoring is the transfer of a body of knowledge from a person who possesses it to one who does not. Implicit in this top-down conceptualization of learning is the idea that literacy is unitary, autonomous, universal and objective.

Community-based adult learning programmes originate from the experience of working with and reflection on the situation of marginalized people and groups and on educational practice among natives, immigrants, the poor and particularly women. This kind of programme, which in its origins combines social action, community organization and education, has been described as "hybrid" (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991, p. xii). Community-based literacy programmes are said to "emphasize collective participation in literacy activities and promote the social, cultural and economic development of the learner" (d'Entremont quoted in Campbell, 1993, p.1). In part, because community-based programmes are oriented to social action and change, they encourage and embrace the complexity of learners' lives and the issues that arise in them.

Principles of Community-based Literacy Programmes

Pointing out the varied usage of the term "community-based", Campbell (1993) has developed a continuum on which programmes may be located, ranging from "critical" to "liberal", depending on their mix of ideological, instructional, tutor training, management and curriculum material characteristics. At the critical end of the continuum, community-based programmes are characterized as operating from a political perspective. They focus on the need to change political and economic structures and on the needs of non-readers. Such programmes prefer group instruction, use popular education and student generated reading material, employ a bottom up tutor training programme, involve students in management decision-making and explain non-participation in terms of resistance and social reproduction theory (Campbell, 1993; 1995).

Campbell describes community-based literacy programmes that are "liberal" as interpreting literacy as an educational phenomenon and focusing on the need for individual change and for reading without regard for the situation of the reader. There is a preference for one-on-one tutoring using a learner-centred approach with commercially available curriculum materials. Tutor training is trainer led. Staff and "the Board" make decisions. Deficit theory is implied in explanations for non-participation that usually blame the learner.

Although the meanings associated with the concept of community-based adult education will differ in practice, understanding and experience, there is a core of principles that define these projects. The programmes themselves are often characterized by struggle between principle and practice (Campbell, 1993). Gaber-Katz & Watson (1991) identify and elaborate three principles as the core of community-based literacy programmes: they strive to be learner centred, they proceed from a critical perspective, and they rationalize themselves as community-building institutions.

Learner-centred practice emphasizes respect for the person who has come to learn. This respect encompasses the learner's personal experience and his or her reasons for returning to learning. So, the relationship between learner and tutor must allow the learner to participate in determining his or her own goals and the curriculum he or she will use to do so. Learner centredness includes a commitment to believing that every person can learn and that in this process and in general, all of us are equal. On this basis, the tutor engages in active listening so that she or he can learn from the student. In this way also, the tutor can help the learner to choose goals that will satisfy him or her, and make curriculum choices that are relevant to her or his interests and needs and may lead the learner to active involvement with others in his or her community in pursuit of community interests. From this perspective, traditional teacher-centred practices are seen as leading to a passive stance toward learning and toward the world. Learner-centred practices encourage an active approach to learning.

A critical perspective on literacy asserts that it is invariably defined by groups from among the elites and usually reflects their experience and interests. Literacy is often used to exclude rather than integrate some groups from participation in society (Street, 1984). Helping students to develop a critical perspective focuses on encouraging them to build their self-confidence and self-understanding through participation in purposeful group activities. In interaction with others about issues of real and experiential importance, skills can be improved, critical understanding developed and language fashioned that can reflect the reality of their lives. A critical awareness is sought not solely for its own sake but also so that it can issue in social action that will help groups to accomplish change in their material condition. The overt recognition of the political dimensions of literacy may be one reason that community-based programmes often do not attract solid funding. They remain a small part of the adult literacy movement in Canada.

Community-based programmes look beyond the walls of the school or the programme to their relationship with the community in which they operate. If literacy is understood as a means of transforming the reality of an individual's poverty or of discrimination, working with others in one's community may be an important means of accomplishing change. Poverty and discrimination breed despair, isolation and often violence. When people who are oppressed internalize this brutality, they may treat each other in a like manner (Fanon, 1961). Looking outward to the community and its needs and goals is the beginning of a process through which people can learn to act toward each other in respectful ways. Group work is favoured as a format in which interpersonal skills can be encouraged, a sense of common interest fostered, a feeling of individual belonging developed and community needs identified and discussed and appropriate action agreed upon in a way that gives meaning to the idea of democratic process.

Origin of The Centre

The Centre is located in a western Canadian city which, in 1981, had a population of approximately 500,000 people. The city is geographically spread over a large area, the greater part of which is suburban. The city centre is compact and not usually the site of social life after business hours. The Centre is in the basement of the City Services Cooperative which occupies the former courthouse - an old brick building long abandoned - that sits on the edge of the city centre and between it and the area that is commonly known as the inner city, which extends for approximately six blocks to the east and twenty blocks to the north of the city centre.

The Centre was organized by Sister L. of the Sisters of Saint John the Divine (Beryl, S. [undated]). It began offering literacy tutoring to women in the inner city in September 1981. Although there were at that time a small number of adult literacy programmes located in the inner city, Sister L. could call upon the support of a number of agencies and people working in adult literacy for assistance in providing services to poor people.

Physical space was provided in a Women's Programme area of a United Church inner city agency. Funding and training were undertaken by experienced people from a programme that arranged one-on-one tutoring for adults in the city. Sister L. drew on the perspectives of religious orders that had been working with the poor in pursuit of "good works" and on the work of more radical educators such as Freire. Also, Sister L. was influenced by the models of Frontier College and the Laubach Programme, operating at that time in other parts of Canada. These programmes, and particularly the latter, emphasized that the key to successful learning was the relationship between student and tutor and the training of the tutor.

With this model in mind, Sister L. concentrated on the training of volunteer tutors, attracting the knowledge and support of experienced literacy workers who were concerned about adult literacy in a broad social context, and in surrounding those who came to learn at the Centre with as much support and encouragement as she could give. She wrote that the programme had to rely on an "organic connection" with other programmes in the city for the flow of tutors, tutor trainers and equipment needed to meet participant's needs. Sister L. did not neglect the sociocultural and ideological dimensions of literacy. For her, these were concentrated in the respect and caring that she was able to establish in her relations with the individuals, mostly women, who arrived at the Centre.

In the late 1980's, the Centre began to emerge as a separate and distinct programme. Elizabeth K. took responsibility for coordinating the programme which found a new home in the basement of an inner city services cooperative. This process continued until the incorporation of the Centre as an independent association in 1992. In September of that year, Elizabeth was succeeded by Sarah who had a doctorate in Reading. She had considerable work experience and contacts in the provincial government literacy bureaucracy as well as connections with the literacy worker community across Canada. She had a vision of adult literacy learning that was informed by a sociocultural perspective and an emphasis on practice oriented to community development.

The Centre Programme

Ideology and Practice at the Centre

The culture created by the Centre coordinator embodies each of the three principles noted above: community orientation, learner centredness, and literacy from a critical perspective (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991). The Peer Tutoring Project began in March 1994. One of its consequences has been the emergence of a more self-conscious community at the Centre. Attempts to establish contacts with other community-based programmes nationally and peer tutoring groups world-wide also contributed to animating an outward oriented active stance toward community-building. The Centre actively raises funds on its own behalf and this too has led it to create friendships with other groups in the city. These ways of acting go beyond "the disadvantaged". We have been described as a "compliant society" (Saul, 1992, p. 335-340; Goyette, 1996). The community-building emphasis of this approach encourages individuals to engage in debate about important communal issues and to take responsibility for decisions and for their consequences.

Critical literacy is pursued in actions such as writing invitations to politicians to visit the Centre, participating in public meetings on topics of interest to the Centre community, and in writing letters-to-the-editor about issues and policies that affect people at the

Centre. The displacement of the Centre and the Co-op building in favour of a concert hall mobilized some students. Others have tried to understand and participate in the debate about budgetary cutbacks in social programmes and in education, most of which have directly affected people who attend the Centre. Both the Women's Group and the Men's Group have tried to examine issues such as spousal abuse, drug use and alcoholism within a larger context of power and powerlessness.

Student-centredness is a dominant value that informs everyday life at the Centre. It is practiced in the emphasis on respect for the individual in everyday relations, in student representation on the Board of Governors of the Centre and in student involvement in course evaluation. Campbell has noted the potential conflict between the aims of student centred learning and the encouragement of critical consciousness among students (Campbell, 1993). An absence of critical consciousness on the part of a student requires someone who thinks critically to help set these goals. They are not necessarily the goals of the student. The student may not have played a conscious role in developing them, may not understand them initially or later and may not either agree with them or want them. The concept of "false consciousness" may be an accurate description, but false consciousness is still the label imposed by the educator.

Trust is an element that runs through the daily life of the Centre and forms a basis for much of the learning that occurs there. This is illustrated in the area of writing. Sarah and other staff at the Centre believe that autobiographical writing is a way in which a person can practice reflective thinking. At the Centre, the first project for many people is to write their own story, to create or recreate themselves through it and at the same time to learn about themselves (Kerby, 1991). Derrida (1974) and others have been fascinated by the possibilities of the written word. Through it, we can both hide or obscure meaning and set it at play in an intricate and heuristic game on the page. We can speak powerfully across time and place. For Thomas, the powerful wish to write was frustrated by his internalized belief that he was incapable of communicating adequately because he didn't have command over the correct syntactic code. The key to that problem was the trust that Sarah, the Centre Coordinator, was able to demonstrate to and in Thomas, and the possibilities that the Centre and its community could offer him.

At the Centre, the conflicting demands of student centredness and the development of a critical perspective are recognized and to a degree made explicit. Power is obviously in the hands of the Centre co-ordinator, Sarah. She has created a number of programmes that are settings in which critical consciousness and the redistribution of power that is associated with it have the potential to work themselves out. That they have not developed beyond this point, is in part, the result of constraining expectations operating in the situation. Many students who come to the Centre do so with expectations about the nature of school. In the schools of their experience, power resides with the teacher. At the Centre, the teachers and co-ordinator wield power but it is benign power, usually exercised in the interests of individual students and the collective. The development of critical consciousness is constrained by the expectations of some students that the co-ordinator will set goals for them and for the community.

Attention to the goal of student centredness is also constrained by the Coordinator's beliefs about the expectations of outside funding agencies. The operation of the Centre is funded by a grant from a provincial government department, by rent subsidy from the municipal government, by project grants and by donations. Total funding is marginally adequate, and loss of any financial sources may cause hardship. Does the Co-ordinator believe that these agencies expect and are geared to understand what occurs at the Centre in terms that are expressed as measurement of individual student progress against the standards of mainstream literacy? If she does see the situation in this light, does she then feel herself in a position in which she sees the demands of student centredness conflicting with the survival needs of the Centre? These conflicting demands may pose the challenge of caution compromising principles.

The practice of adult literacy education at the Centre attends to both the ideological and pragmatic realities of adult education programming and would find itself at different points on the "critical - liberal" continuum at different times. The Centre's practice is practical. Although staff perspectives may be informed by a political consciousness, many students come "to get an education" and to better their own lives and in this way, to help others. They do not see the Centre as a crucible of revolution. Group instruction has been preferred at times, but one-on-one tutoring has a valued place as well. The cost and scarcity of materials make their origin academic although student produced work is encouraged and honoured. On the surface, students are involved in major management decisions. In practice, the day to day operation of the Centre is in the hands of the Co-ordinator. Board deliberations and decisions are carried by the outside appointees who generally follow the advice of the Co-ordinator. The interpretation of student non-participation is a struggle. For staff, who usually are university educated and middle class in origin, the deficit model may be a more natural source of interpretive theory than

Resistance Theory or other theoretical accounts that interpret the learner in more favourable terms.

The Weekly Schedule

The weekly schedule changed over time, from year to year and from semester to semester. It also was flexible from week to week, although this latter tendency decreased over time. Changes reflected both pragmatic responses to immediate practical and scheduling needs and Sarah's own experimentation and changing practical theory. Group meetings might be rescheduled if it became necessary, for example, to bake for the upcoming lobster supper fund raiser. The number of groups meeting also waned or rose depending in part on the ideological value given to group work at any time. Tutors also changed. When students complained about the way in which Jane was leading the writing class, she was not asked to return. Sarah took over leadership of the writing group. At any given time, while some students were working in groups, others would be working with a tutor or on their own. In the beginning, there was no pressure on students to develop goals and pursue them through group work or one-on-one tutoring. Many of the people who came to the Centre were deeply suspicious of schooling. They were encouraged first to gain a sense of security at the Centre and a first-hand appreciation that they could make learning decisions for themselves. As their time at the Centre lengthened, Sarah became more concerned about student progress and discussed the situation with them. Generally, students were expected to move in the direction of one kind of participation or another.

The Centre Population

Centre students frequently state that they look to returning to "school" to overcome isolation and fear. Janice and Edith both felt that the Centre offered them a haven for their battered self-esteem. Janice appreciates that the pace was slow enough that she can learn more thoroughly. Edith worried that "Things don't stick in, I can't remember things for very long." For both Janice and Edith trust was an important component of the Centre programme and community. Lance appreciated the physical safety and sense of security and quiet that the Centre offered him. He wants to learn to be more consistent, to have priorities, to concentrate. Like Edith he also complains that he can't remember things. He wants to learn a different way of life. He thinks that he wants a job and his driver's license back, to see his family, get off of skid row. He wants to become more flexible in his thinking. He wants to learn to trust people. Pamela looks on the Centre as an opportunity to change her life. When Pamela was in school she partied and drank a lot. It got in the way of school. She had been out of school since she was twelve years old. She is now twenty. Pamela has a baby and she feels that he has helped settle her down. She describes him as a "light". She felt stupid because she couldn't read. She says that her baby has opened doors for her. She comes to the Centre because at least here she can bring him with her. Pamela says that she wants to "build learning" to "get a better life".

Some people who register at the Centre have little formal schooling. Others have completed junior high school or dropped out of school at an earlier grade level or have completed high school courses designated for mentally challenged students. Most people who come to the Centre do read and write and even though this may be inadequate to community needs and definitions, it is often more developed than they themselves believe it to be.

The Centre is now known quite widely among the poor inner city residents and among those who work with them. Referrals come from diverse sources. Of the students who responded to a questionnaire, prepared by students, about their reasons for coming to the Centre, four had come as a result of a referral by their social assistance worker, four enrolled on the recommendation of a friend, two had learned about the Centre while at another adult learning programme, and one each had found out about it through the yellow pages, the Bissell Centre (United Church services for the poor), the Bissell Centre Women's Programme, and by chance. Five people had been attending the Centre for one year or less; three had been there for between one and one-half and two years; two had been students for three years and one person had been attending for about four years. Three students who completed the questionnaire did not respond to this question. Of these fourteen students and others registered at the Centre, ten attended full-time, and two attended half-day. Seven attended all day. (These respondents did not indicate how many days they attended each week). Attendance is generally consistent and retention is high. People seem to see themselves as joining a community as well as coming to a "school".

Many students responded to the emphasis on group work and participate in a range of group activities. The Writing and the Math classes seem to be of greatest interest to them. Of 18 students, 16 were learning through participation in learning group activities. Two preferred to work on their own. The Art class attracted eight of these 18 students; 15 were enrolled in writing, 14 in math; 11 participated in the Women's Group; nine students were in the reading circle, six in the peer tutoring project, and nine were involved in newsletter production.

Students said that they felt comfortable in the surroundings. They felt that they had freedom to move and they enjoyed the large space of the room. People did not see the Centre as crowded although some expressed the feeling that too many things were happening simultaneously and this affected their concentration on the activities that they were doing. Students were generally satisfied with the tutorial and teaching support that they received, although they would have liked to have had more tutors. They felt tutors instilled confidence, encouraged, helped students understand, and kept them from giving up when they "hit a snag."

The Centre community included students, paid full and part-time staff and volunteer tutors. Some people who came to lead classes such as Art and Math, at specific times each week, were paid for their work. Sarah, as coordinator, was a full-time paid staff member. Other staff included individuals whose job descriptions varied and whose presence was associated with the interest of religious denominations in the work of the Centre and in serving the poor and the inner city population. Some staff were supported by term grants. Tutors were recruited by word of mouth and worked one-on-one, usually with one or a few people, at pre-arranged times each week.

People who register at the Centre as students are most often poor and frequently on Welfare or a government support programme, for example, Assistance for the Severely Handicapped. They live throughout the city but many live in houses or rooms in and around the inner city. Some suffer from chronic health problems and are often absent from the Centre. Other individuals rarely miss a day at the Centre.

Thomas

In October, 1993, I was a doctoral student specializing in Assessment and Remediation of Reading Disability in the Department of Elementary Education at the local university in the city. In September, I had been assigned as a teaching assistant to the Director of the Reading and Language Centre. She held a grant to continue research in retention in adult literacy education, and more particularly to explore the factors that supported long term commitment to programmes by literacy learners. I agreed to conduct the field research for this project. I observed activity at the Centre, helped to identify and recruit five individuals in the programme who met the definition of "successful", and interviewed each individual twice during a six month period. "Successful" was equated with having been integrated into the student community of the Centre and having been a full-time student there for about a year. I came to understand this work as groundwork for the study reported here. Thomas was one of the students who met these requirements and who consented to participate in the study. We became acquainted through this research.

Sarah, the Coordinator of the Centre, had been speculating about the possibilities of organizing a peer tutoring group at the Centre. In the Winter of 1994, she received a grant to support a Peer Tutoring group. The project began at that time and I was hired as the researcher to document the history of the project. Thomas was among the original student members of that peer tutoring group. Thus, Thomas and I had many points of contact during the following two years.

Origins and Culture

Thomas lives within and between two distinct cultures. The one is a white, Newfoundland culture displaced to Western Canada. The other is the native Cree culture which is that of his wife Susan, and the mother of Thomas' children. In this sense, there is no single cultural label that applies to Thomas and his family. They live in-between cultures. Different cultures call upon Thomas and upon his family, making claims on them. He and his family together negotiate their way restlessly through and between both cultures, on the margins and the outskirts of both cultures. Inasmuch as both cultures are marginal within mainstream society, they seem to stand in a similar relationship to the mainstream.[1]

The aptness of the bridge metaphor is most graphically reflected in the cultural union represented by his family and children. Although he has lived most of his life in the province, Thomas is a Newfoundlander. His grandmother lives there; he has visited there on at least two occasions, and he thinks of it as his family home. Home, in this instance, has some clear cultural patterns associated with it. Fagan (1993) has pointed out the importance of oral language in animating print literacy among Newfoundlanders. When Thomas speaks, his Newfoundland lilt and vocabulary are still evident. To be present when his mother, father, sister and brother are all socializing in the kitchen of his house is to imagine oneself among neighbours in an outport fishing village on the Newfoundland coast.

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[1] I have partially adapted the metaphor of "Dwelling in the Zone of Between" from the metaphor of being on a bridge, used by Aoki, (1991, p. 8) to describe the tensionality of teaching between the general of the curriculum and the uniqueness of each child/student. For Thomas, this tensionality emerges in being a learner, travelling from the familiar to the unknown.

Thomas' family arrived in the province from Eastern Canada when he was six or seven years old and about the time he began his schooling in Grade 1. At that time, the province was beginning an economic boom that would last for almost fifteen years. This economic force transformed the province from an agricultural and moderately poor region into a modern, resource-based economy supporting a relatively affluent and mostly urbanized population. In the period between 1970 and 1996, the population of the city grew from about 430,000 to 616,000. During this period, many people migrated to this area from the eastern part of the country seeking jobs and opportunity in the expanding economy. Traditionally, many Newfoundlanders leave the island in search of work on the mainland. The boom in Western Canada attracted a large number of Newfoundlanders to the province in search of the work that was not available at home. Thomas' family was among them. His father found work as a labourer on a farm near the eastern outskirts of the city. After moving from place to place in the area, the family finally settled in the city. Thomas has lived here since then.

Although he has lived in the province since the age of about seven, Newfoundland culture is still a living experience for Thomas. Thomas states proudly that his father leads a band that plays traditional Newfoundland music at bars in all parts of the province. Recently, he related that one of his uncles had lost his job after living in the province for ten years. His uncle, he said, had packed what he could of his belongings into his car and, in the middle of winter, had begun the 7000 kilometer car trip back to Newfoundland. Thomas' cultural roots are not theoretical or abstract. They are immediate, practical and concrete.

In broad outline, the course of Thomas' childhood, school and job experience is echoed in the experience of other men who attend the Centre, although his childhood does not reflect the abuse that many other students have reported. Bob is a friend of Thomas' at the Centre. Bob is now in his early fifties. In his youth, he related that he was removed from his home, classified as mentally slow and sent to a "foster farm" where he worked. Afterwards, he was in the military and was a security guard. He worked for many years as a porter in a large local hospital before being laid off. Don is another student at the Centre. He wrote this story about his childhood:

> My dad got drunk then my Mom started to get mad at my Dad and say things like "Your sister and people around Anzac, they said that you don't like your son. You always treat him like illegitimate child."
>
> Then dad would take it out on me. He would say things like "Crippled old limping

> person!" or "Good for nothing bastard! and start to grab a big willow and ram that right across my back and I cried so loud and ran out of the house and Dad chased me too. It was so hard and painful I almost fainted, so I ran to tallest grass to hide there. But my Dad caught up to me so he pushed me down and called me names and pissed on me all over. I managed to break loose and get away from him and I ran away again to hide in the grass so he stayed there for about one hour... (Don, Autobiography, 1995)

In comparison with other students at the Centre, Thomas grew up in a secure home. Although his parents had divorced when he was young, they were both present in his life. He had siblings and friends and a clear cultural identity.

Early Schooling

Thomas' memories of school communicate an indignant sense of being left to his own devices and a belief in his own lack of ability to learn. He related that:

> If I had a problem with math or something the teacher'd say, "Well, go on to something else." What good does that do? You still don't get the answer or learn what you wanted to learn to begin with. You skip it and after a while that's the way it turned out. If I had a problem, I'd just go on to something else...
>
> There were a lot of students that were a lot smarter than I was. Well, if we had the same book, they could go through it no problem. A lot of times, the teacher would be standing there watching them read and I'd be sitting there in the corner with a problem and she'd tell me to go on to something else and I couldn't figure out why if that student there can do it all why is he getting all the attention and I don't know the problem and get stuck in the corner. (Interview, 25/1/94)

The kind of classroom that Thomas briefly describes in this quote is a teacher-centred classroom in which skills and information are transmitted from teacher to students (Freire, 1985, p. 17). Usually, students receive the same knowledge at the same time and the material is meted out on a teacher-directed schedule. Knowledge is implicitly treated as an external, possibly immutable and derived object.

Until moving into the city when he was eleven and in grade four or five, Thomas attended rural schools. He wrote that his family was "moving around from one place to another" (Thomas, Autobiography) and he was transferred from one school to another, to at least three that he mentions, at different places in the countryside to the east of the city. He said:

> In one school, you get a certain amount of friends you know. You meet people and then a month or two down the road, you got to move...You have to make all new friends again, start all over again, get to know the teachers all over

> again and not every school works at the same pace the same way. (Interview, 25/1/94)

This transience does not fit well with schools. Such institutions are organized, in part, on the assumption that families remain stable and rooted in one place. Different teachers and different schools approach reading and writing differently. One teacher may base his/her teaching on a whole-to-part approach while another may adopt a more linear model that emphasizes mastery of discrete parts in sequence. They may be using different published materials. They may be on different schedules. From the perspective of a child who is being moved from school to school, the message about print literacy will most probably be fragmented, more difficult to piece together and less amenable to the experimentation that children usually practice in learning the meaning and use of the print code. Thomas' recollections suggest that he was experiencing these difficulties.

Thomas' difficulties in learning were accompanied by what school authorities viewed as disciplinary infractions for which he was punished. At age twelve, Thomas was strapped when a teacher caught him about to heave a snowball. Increasingly, he was absent from school. Giroux (1983) refers to the incomplete negotiation of dominance and oppositional contradictions in some forms of resistance to hegemony. It is, he says, a dialectical process. This is illustrated in Thomas' acting out in response to his classroom difficulties and the ensuing spiral of response and resistance. The result was Thomas' early withdrawal from schooling. His immediate opportunity to oppose authority was achieved at the expense of possible further schooling.

When he was eleven, things began to unravel in Thomas' life and family. Shortly after his younger sister was born, the family moved into the city and within a year his parents were divorced. There were six young children in the family under the care of the mother. Within two years, Thomas' older brother, who was fifteen years old at that time, was killed. Thomas claims that a stolen car driven by his brother was forced off the road near Hinton by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Thomas began to stay away from school. Social constructions, such as, for example, "participation" in schooling, are not only areas of ideological domination but are also subject to state intervention for the purpose of ensuring attendance. Attendance cannot be forced and resistance is possible (Giroux, 1983). Thomas related that one school day, while his mother was out and he was alone in the house, he was taken into custody as a truant and held in the youth detention facility for about four days until his mother was able to find him and arrange his release. After this episode, he left school permanently. He was fourteen years old. Thomas had reached what Giroux calls, "the limits of resistance" at which point the contradictions of opposition become apparent. Thomas' choice of resistance acts deprived him of the tools that he might use to free himself from the frustrating dilemmas that cause the resistance to arise.

When he left school, he said that he could not yet read. He defined this in very concrete, social and functional terms, saying:

> When I quit school, I couldn't even read the menu in a restaurant. I could read some words. Something that was really simple. It couldn't be big words. I couldn't read writing. (Interview, 25/1/94)

Thomas' early school experiences are characterized more by their pedestrian nature than by any overt wrong. John was a native student from British Columbia who was enrolled at the Centre. His early life was very different from Thomas' but his relationship to literacy and to schooling is similar to Thomas' experiences with them. John was one of fourteen children. He had lived in seventeen foster homes. At age two he was diagnosed with TB and spent two years in a hospital a long distance from his home village. Shortly thereafter, he was sent to a residential school which he describes as crowded and brutal. He left there at age fifteen and was sent back to his family with whom he had not lived for thirteen of his fifteen years. At first he reports that he had a

> ...feeling of freedom. We went hunting and fishing and we smoked and dried fish for the winter. (Men's Group Meeting, 28/11/94)

When another family member returned, his situation worsened. He claims to have been treated like "a slave" in the family home, until he was removed by a social worker and sent by a judge to a school for delinquent boys as a temporary solution until a foster home could be found for him. None was and he spent his remaining youth at that school. John enjoyed a regulated and structured life there for two years when he left the school at seventeen. He says that he grew up feeling neglected and unloved. In contrast to Thomas, John has spent virtually his whole life in institutions. While both Thomas and John had very different upbringings, both seem to have fallen through the cracks in educational systems.

Learning to Read from a Friend

Thomas relied on his friends to accomplish some literacy tasks and to help him learn to read. After his brother's death, he was befriended by Rod, a friend of his brother's. In public, Thomas was very embarrassed at not being able to read and write. In restaurants, he would order what someone else had ordered and try to remember not to order it again if it turned out not to be to his liking. Rod noticed this and began to help Thomas in the everyday course of their time together. He pointed out street signs to him and coached him with other environmental and useful print which they would come across. The bond of caring that Thomas describes when he talks about this person is very powerful. He said:

> He asked me about it and I says like we're good friends a long time and he says if you have trouble reading, tell me about it so I told him then he started helping me. But a couple of days later, we went to another restaurant again with another friend of ours and I was looking at the menu and this guy was giving me a hard time. "Hurry up and order something" and my buddy Rod, he got really freaked. He got up and says, "Leave him alone. He's having a hard time reading so leave him alone." I thought Rod was going to hit the guy.. He was really sensitive about the fact I couldn't read. So from that point on, he started helping me read all the time...
>
> It took a while. Stuff out of the Autotrader. We're both into vehicles. So we started out with that then just driving around he'd point out a sign and he'd get me to read it...That guy was there everyday. It was just like having another big brother. (Interview, 25/1/94)

Thomas is a person with a very strong sense of independence, equality and privacy. Being unable to read and write genuinely threatened this independence. He recalled:

> He [Rod] used to see me get frustrated a lot. I'd get mad. I'd throw the menu on the table or sometimes I'd even get up and walk out. It's more or less like being thrown in the water when you can't swim. (Interview, 25/1/94)

His description of the circumstances under which Rod came to recognize his difficulty and to help him drives home the importance for him of the balance between independence and literacy. After leaving school, Thomas had felt that he was unable to learn. With Rod's help, his belief in his ability to learn was renewed. This contrasts with the experiences of Don, John and Bob. Neither Don nor John referred to friends or family in their lives. Bob lived with and was supported in his learning efforts by his wife who was a graduate of the Centre programme. Outside of his wife, Bob lived in isolation even from his daughter, from whom he was estranged. Thomas' network of friendships and family set him apart from many other men at the Centre.

Work

Thomas began working shortly after he left school. During the next sixteen years, he worked mostly as a dishwasher in restaurants in the city and in the cafeterias of logging camps in the northern part of the province. He also was employed in at least one service station pumping gas; he did seasonal work, and was a labourer in the oil fields. Washing dishes did not seem to involve any contact with print but on occasion, when working in restaurants, Thomas had to take orders. He described this as an aural memory exercise made easier by menus that were limited to "burgers and fries". He would try to remember the order long enough to get to the kitchen and communicate it to the cook.

Working in a gas station included recording sales and making change using a cash register. At one gas station job where a long distance bus depot was located, his job included filling in bills-of-lading and baggage tickets. The use of the cash register was a matter of associating items being bought with symbols on the register keys. Reading, and particularly the writing needed to complete the baggage forms, was accomplished in this way:

> I worked in a service station where we used to have to do up the bus tickets for the Greyhound...and a lot of them I couldn't fill out so what I would do especially for people who had to have bags tagged, I'd take the ticket out and I'd tell the customer "Well here you fill this out I'll go get your baggage ticket and that will speed things up a bit so you're not waiting around for a long time." So, I'd go get the baggage ticket and they'd be filling out the form when I got back. I didn't have to do it...I used to do that all the time. Do a lot of jobs by doing that. (Interview, 3/8/95).

Apparently, this procedure worked not only for Thomas but also for the customer. Thomas was able to have the ticket form filled out and hide his lack of skill in writing. Fingeret (1983) points out that marginally literate people, like most people, rely on others for help in a variety of circumstances. The key in this situation is in the need to accomplish the task in a framework of reciprocity and symmetry. A person must be able to give as well as take and give what is perceived by him as equal value in order to give credence to his belief in his own independence with restricted literacy. Thomas met both of these requirements with panache.

These jobs would last for a few months and then he would be laid off. He tried returning to school at least three time, at S College, at a vocational college and at PALS, a programme that arranged one-on-one tutoring in a private setting. At the insistence of his social welfare worker, he attended a twelve week Life Skills course at S College, a private institution contracted for service by the provincial government. Thomas considers the Life Skills course a success. It helped him to overcome an alcohol problem and to stop smoking. His attempt to re-enter formal schooling was through a provincial vocational college where he was started in a literacy transition and upgrading class. He left the programme after about one month, explaining that he needed to work to support himself. In part, he felt that the experience was a flashback to his school career when he could not get the attention of the teacher and felt embarrassed in front of the class (Interview, 25/1/94). Thomas' persistence in pursuing literacy education stands out among students at the Centre. For example, other men related their disdain for their early schooling and for programmes at which they had failed. Other than Thomas and except for mandatory Lifeskills classes, few other men reported having attempting adult schooling before registering at the Centre.

Marriage and Family

Thomas and Susan met in the city. About eight years ago when Thomas was twenty-six years old, they were married. Susan is a Cree Indian. She was raised on a reserve about two and one-half hours northeast of the city. She finished grade ten at the reserve school and moved to the city where some of her brothers and sisters were living.

When I met Susan in 1994, they had two children. Their son Brian is now seven and in Grade 1 at a local elementary school where their daughter Lynn, a year younger than her brother, attends kindergarten. Thomas' sense of his role as husband and father is strong.

Thomas stated that he was motivated to enroll at the Centre by his wish that his children wouldn't see him as a poor role model and blame him for their own possible failure. In our private discussions, he frequently talked about his children. He is an attentive father. He often picks up his children from school, is involved in their school lives and problems, and accompanies them to the doctor on their frequent visits. Generally, he attends to their needs although, in his home, he assumes a more traditional role and either expects his wife to care for their needs or ignores them except when he feels that discipline is needed. In these cases, he is quick to threaten physical punishment although I have never seen him use it or say that he has done so.

Thomas' relationship with his wife has ups and downs but seems to be based on realistic assumptions about what such relationships can be. For example, on several occasions he spoke about large long distance telephone bills that he found difficult to pay. Susan had long daily conversations with her mother on the reserve and these telephone calls were costly. In the past, Thomas had had his telephone service terminated for non-payment of his bills. This concerned him because he was using his telephone line to access email and the internet. Thomas did not try to change Susan's habits. He stated that he expected his mother-in-law to help pay for the long distance telephone bills. There were no arguments between Susan and Thomas about this sensitive issue.

At meetings of the Men's Group, wife abuse was discussed. In these discussions and at other times when gender issues were touched upon, most of the men in the group expressed bitterness and resentment toward women. They said that women really controlled relationships. Ironically, they expressed a strong need to defend women, particularly "their" women against the threats and depredations of other men and they seemed to resent not having more opportunity to be the hero in these stories.

Thomas was quite different. His comments about women were low key and pragmatic, particularly at the Centre in relation to a commonly held perception among the men that the Women's Group was favoured over the Men's Group. He didn't participate in the recounting of "heroic" stories about his experiences with "his" wife. He criticized men who thought of women as objects. In a Men's Group discussion about family responsibility, he spoke at length about how he and his wife discuss questions of family affairs and seem to divide the labour according to skill and interest.

Thomas' marriage underwent some difficult moments during the research study. It survived these problems. Bob was one of the few other married men attending the Centre. Most other men were single and living alone. Thomas' marriage and his relationship with his wife Susan were also characterized by attitudes that were not common among the men at the Centre. Thomas treated his wife with respect. At a meeting of the Men's Group after screening a film on wife abuse, men made strong anti-women statements, blaming women for provoking abuse. These attitudes expressed themselves not only in talk among men but in individual acts as well. For example, in a community which is influenced by the views of the Co-ordinator and in which feminist issues of equality have an important place, Bob expressed crude sexual jokes and in his personal relations with some women at the Centre, occasionally conducted himself in objectionable ways. James stated strong disdain for women based on his recollection of a failed marriage. Don had to be warned by Centre staff about his sexual comments and solicitation of women in the programme. Thomas' feelings about women were invariably milder. His attitudes toward women at the Centre were also positive. He maintained active friendships with many women students.

Cultural Differences

The Newfoundland and the Cree people and their cultures are different from mainstream culture. The differences often have consequences, be it in schooling, at work or in public perception. Members of both groups are the subject of some discrimination, natives more so than Newfoundlanders. The "Newfie joke" alerts us to the existence of a stereotype of the Newfoundlander and, by its public nature, possibly signals that it does not carry either strong prejudice or sanction (Interview, 25/1/94). In these jokes the Newfoundlander is portrayed as the yokel, the dumb one. Some of this prejudice plays on the distinct and archaic form of English that is characteristic of the Newfoundland dialect. Some of the bias also relates to the stigma attached to poverty and the practical theory about the poverty of the province, the isolation and supposed desolation of the outport fishing villages and the tradition of Newfoundlanders migrating to other parts of Canada to work. Thomas has seldom talked about this kind of discrimination. He did recall that as a youth, other children in school ridiculed him for his accent. Occasionally, he referred to discrimination against people from Newfoundland. Usually he referred to jokes that were comments on the particular accent of Newfoundlanders. He spoke fondly, if remotely, of "home" and of his grandmother and cousins there. When Thomas expresses anger about the way he or one of his children was treated at their school, he appealed to universal standards of decency rather than to claims of bigotry.

Although the reserves, and more particularly their band and the land that they live on, remain the focus of their culture[2], many native people emigrate to the city looking for work, education, better housing, and social and health services than can be found on many reserves (Frideres, 1983). Susan was raised and educated on a reserve about two and one-half hours from The city. Her parents live on the reserve. She came to the city looking for opportunity, joining a sister who also lives in the city. By 1996, there were approximately 40,000 to 50,000 aboriginal people in The city of a total population of about 650,000 (Frideres, 1983). This represents a significant growth in the native population of the city during the past ten years. Susan has fared better than many native people who come to the city. There is high unemployment among this population in The city. Poverty, family discord and alcoholism are common problems. Discrimination in many facets of society is fueled by negative attitudes and images of natives among the non-native population. Thomas and Susan live in an in-between world of native and non-native inter-marriage which is common but not widespread. Thomas' brother is also married to a native woman. Thomas and Susan and their children have strong relationships with both the Newfoundland and the native sides of their families. Thomas' mother is a visitor to their home and an occasional baby-sitter. The family regularly visits the reserve. Thomas states that he feels comfortable there. He is also often recruited to transport his mother-in-law back and forth from the reserve to his home where she remains for several weeks at a time. Some of Susan's nieces and nephews also visit Thomas' home for prolonged periods. While Susan's family seems to be an irritant to Thomas, his remarks suggest that what annoys him is the number of Susan's relatives who often live temporarily in his house.

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[2] James Dempsey, Director of the University of Alberta Native Studies Centre (personal communication), suggests that the preoccupation among bands with land claims has focused most of the talent, interest and finances in that direction and other issues such as those related to native life in cities, have been neglected. Frideres (1983) supports this observation and also points out that this operates in part because native leadership remains on the reserves. He associates this with the failure of urban native institutions to achieve

Cultural Involvement

The life of the reserve is a present reality for Thomas and his family. Susan and Thomas, or often Thomas alone, will drive the two and one-half hours to bring her from the reserve and then either drive her home or to visit another relative at another reserve. Thomas has frequently complained about the driving and about the long distance telephone charges that Susan accumulates in long conversations with her mother. He demonstrates a grasp of reserve politics and culture. On several occasions, he explained family alliances and divisions within the reserve. He described reserve politics and influence in relation to the distribution of oil royalty money, which is done at Christmas, and is considered an important event in Thomas' family. The extra money allows Thomas and Susan to buy the children many of the toys that they have requested.

Thomas and Susan appear to think of the reserve as an ultimate security blanket. Thomas has spoken about eventually moving to the reserve and raising dogs there. When they were put in a desperate situation concerning payment of daycare fees, it was to the band council that they finally turned for a decision about funds to cover their obligation. Brian also thinks of the reserve as a home. The walls of their livingroom are covered with idealized charcoal drawings of Plains Indians as well as photos of maternal grandparents

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the stage of institutional completeness. The absence of these institutions accounts to a degree for the lack of stability in much of urban native life.

and cousins on the reserve. Brian and Lynn know each person by name and have a story to tell about each relative. Brian speaks about the horse that has been bought for him. Among his more practiced, written words, aided by his mother, are the Cree words for "grandmother" (kokum) and "grandfather" (moshum), both of whom live on the reserve.

Beginning in late Spring and continuing into September, Thomas and Susan, Brian and Lynn often spend weekends in different parts of the province at Sun Dances and other Powwows (The Writer #6). People travel long distances to attend the competitive dancing and the socializing that precedes it. The costumes are dazzling, the sound of the drums mesmerizing and the excitement contagious. Thomas and Susan, Brian and Lynn not only attend many of these powwows, they look forward to them. Both the children are proud of their costumes - jingle dresses for Lynn, sewn by her mother — and both participate in the dancing. At powwows, a great deal of time is spent socializing, with children given great rein to wander. The dancing occurs throughout the weekend of the powwow. For the children as well as for the adults, these happenings appear to be powerful instruments for the transmission and maintenance of the culture and its values.

Of the men at the Centre, approximately half were aboriginal and half were caucasian. The white men at the Centre were generally older men with substantial work histories, accompanied by alcoholism, family breakup, violence and drug use. Bob's experience of being labeled as mentally retarded and removed from his home at a young age is not unusual among these men. He, Lance and other men reported long addiction to alcohol and some were still addicted to it. The experience of Don and John in Indian Residential Schools (King, 1967) was unique to native children and could not be a part of Thomas' history. Other native men at the Centre were generally younger. They had moved to the city from reserves where educational opportunity was limited. Many of them had been in jail for property crimes. Some were married. Few had had jobs. Thomas appeared to live in-between the experiences of these groups and moved with ease and comfort between both groups. However, although he was white, Thomas was from a distinct and devalued Canadian cultural background. Although he was married to a native woman and participated to a degree in native life, he could not lay claim to the unique status and privileges associated with native life in Western Canada under the Department of Indian and Native Affairs and the various treaty conditions under which native people live.

Living on Social Assistance

Stereotyping and bigotry are associated with and complicated by the stigma attached to poverty in this city. Thomas is on Social Assistance. This means that for himself, his wife and their two children, he receives government support of $1400.00 per month. Thomas thinks of himself as poor. He thinks of poverty as a stigma and being on Social Assistance as a stressful and fearful condition (Men's Group, videotape, 11/95). Continuation on Social Assistance, unless there are medical reasons, is contingent on attending a school or an upgrading programme (Norgaard, 1995).

Thomas is afraid to tell people that he is on Assistance and afraid that people whom he knows or even does not know will learn of it. He feels stigmatized but justifies being on Welfare as a temporary situation necessitated by his "returning to school" and that it will result in a good job. Nonetheless, he says that he is worried all the time that he and his family will be cut from the Welfare rolls. He described how he would break out in a cold sweat when a Government envelope arrived in the mail. He was so afraid that it might be one of the letters telling him that he was being taken off Assistance or a letter withholding payment until documentation was provided that he would have Brian collect the mail (Interview, 30/5/96).

He understands his work history as one of having worked at menial, low paying jobs with little security and even less right to security. He accepts that in these jobs he has relied on the sympathy of supervisors and bosses. Although he worries about being on Welfare and thinks of himself as being under stress because of the demands of the social service system, he also believes that he has a right to Social Assistance. He sees himself as responsible for the support of his family and feels badly that he is unable to support them now, although he does foresee a time when he will be able to do so, partly as a consequence of "getting educated" at the Centre.

Men at the Centre have different sources of support. Bob receives a disability pension from the hospital where he worked for many years. John works at one job and sometimes two jobs while attending the Centre. He is proud to support himself. When dismissed from one job, he worried about having to ask for Social Assistance. He did not want to have to apply for Assistance but felt he would soon be unable to pay his rent. He applied for other jobs but did not find full time work. John accepted the societal view that conscientious work is rewarded and respected, although this view contradicts his experience and his current situation.

Some people at the Centre receive monthly support under a provincial government programme for the severely handicapped. When the provincial government began reducing welfare rolls, many men at the Centre expressed support for this position. Although welfare recipients themselves, they were suspicious of others who were receiving public assistance. Whether currently on welfare or not, most of the men in the Men's Group had accepted public assistance in the past. Thomas was different in this respect. He had worked in the past and was a recent Welfare recipient. Thomas and the other men collectively stated their feeling of shame at being on public assistance. When Thomas described the stress of being on welfare, other men strongly agreed with him. Accepting social assistance is a new experience for Thomas. He does not like or want to be on the Welfare rolls. However, for Thomas as for most of the men at the Centre, welfare is a reality that can be justified using public explanations and by being perceived as a temporary measure.

Returning to School

When we first met, Thomas had already been registered at the Centre for over one year. His opinion of his reading and writing competence were lower than my casual assessment of them. He did not feel that his literacy abilities had been adequate to hold onto most of the jobs that he had had. He was anxious at the prospect of being thought of as "illiterate" by others. During the seventeen years between leaving junior high school and registering at the Centre, he had tried school learning at least twice. He turned away from both, yet had come to try schooling for a third time at the Centre.

Thomas was working at a gas station, pumping gas, in what he thought of as a regular job if not a high paying one. He said that his boss took care to give him some material extras. He was laid off from that job. He said:

> I've done pumping gas and digging ditches. They'd last for six months and then you're looking for another job. I just finally got tired of it. I figured it's time to get the education going. Before I came here I never dreamed about doing this. Well, I dreamed about it. That's all it was. It was a dream. (Interview, 3/8/95)

He said that he decided that he would never find a steady job without basic reading and writing skills. He said that he didn't want his own children to follow in his footsteps and blame him for their possible inability to read. Entering the Centre was difficult. He explained:

> I stood outside. I'm just about to leave... I was worried about what others would think, not what I would get out of it - how it would help me. I was worried that as soon as I walked in the door they'd know he can't read or he can't write. Like it's written all over my face or I'm carrying a sign. It bothered me that people would think that. A lot of it was that people would figure that I'm not smart enough to learn...otherwise I would have learnt it already. When I first started I was always in the corner. I would get here early so that the corner would be empty. I'd stay there except to go to the washroom or for coffee. I didn't say a word. Now I talk to anybody. I didn't know I could do it (things). (Interview, 1/25/94)

For some students, particularly for some women, lack of support from the home leads to premature withdrawal. In Thomas' case, he feels that the support he receives from his family and friends is strong. He said:

> Now they hear I'm going to school, learning to read, learning to write...I have a lot of friends come up and tell me how happy they are, how much they respect the fact I'm going back and taking the time to learn... Even when I go home my wife asks how was your day at school? It makes you feel important. It makes you feel a part of life. Even my brothers and sisters when they heard I was going back to school, it was right on they thought. (Interview, 1/25/94)

Initially, he attended half days. After a short while, he decided that he could study math and reading and writing and also retain more. It didn't take Thomas too long to make friends at the Centre and to join in different activities. Eventually, Thomas was involved in a number of learning groups and a peer tutoring project and he elected to the Board of Governors of the Centre as one of two student representatives.

Thomas and the Centre

The Centre was a place where Thomas had the opportunity to reinforce, use, balance and transcend his local network. Before Thomas' computer had been upgraded and linked to other people through a modem and the internet, home provided little by way of literacy support for him.

The following scenario describes a day during Thomas' involvment at the Centre. Thomas is dressed and ready to leave the house. Susan is awake and is sitting on the couch. She watches TV and talks on the phone long distance with her mother, in Cree, a language that Thomas does not understand. Thomas' son Brian and daughter Lynn are lying on the couch beside Susan. They are red-eyed and not feeling well. Thomas and Lynn decide that the children will not go to school today.

I, too, have been recruited as a member of Thomas' network. We meet before the Centre opens, at a snack bar across the street from the Centre. I talk about my work/research, Thomas talks about hunting, the reserve, a trailer that was a lost opportunity to buy at a good price and its relation to the ideal life in the future on an acreage east of the city with kennels and dogs. Alternatively, he talks about life on the reserve where his wife's family lives, with land and a vegetable garden. He spends some time gathering my reaction to and opinion about breeding dogs and in particular, about how to address a letter to a dog breeder to whom he intends to write in pursuit of a certificate for a dog he has recently acquired. As his engagement with computers grows, these meetings increasingly focus on computer hardware and software and the questions that he has about how to install them and how to further develop the computer's capability.

Community and networks require symmetry and reciprocity. Thomas spends the morning involved in a meeting of the Peer Tutoring Group. He and four other peer tutors as well as Sarah and I participate in a peer tutoring group meeting. He responds to requests for opinions. Tutoring logs are discussed; respect for others is emphasized; Sarah lists questioning techniques on a flipchart. Thomas, together with other students, is involved in a discussion about them.

At noon, he accompanies me to The Shopping Centre to buy some tapes for the tape recorder. We engage in conversation about computers. As the afternoon begins at the Centre, Thomas asks me to help him fill out his income tax return. We do this together. As we finish, Sarah approaches Thomas. She engages in talk about the audio and video tapes of the Peer Tutoring meetings. The discussion is about a technical problem; the sound quality on the videotape is poor. The discussion is about how to improve it. Thomas has gained a reputation for technical know-how and Sarah often asks him to help when a technical problem arises. The wiring in the VCR that is used to play back the videotaped Peer Tutoring meetings is unpredictable. Thomas uses his skill to set up the VCR for Sarah so that it will work reliably. During the rest of the afternoon, Thomas moves from place to place at the Centre, sitting down at tables and talking with other students and staff. Toward the end of the Centre day, he waits in the foyer, talking to people who come by. He approaches Sarah. They walk to the segregated staff area. Thomas talks with her about a problem that he is having with the Department of Social Services. Afterwards, he leaves the Centre for home.

Thomas' involvement at the Centre is typified by complex and multiple exchange relationships. He initiated and constructed a mobile blackboard stand for Sarah; accompanied me to select and buy wood which he took to his home and used to build a bicycle rack. When the Centre became the recipient of a used portable computer, he set it up for use and helped at least one person to learn how to use it. At the Centre, Thomas was most often observed working at a computer terminal, usually one of the newer Macs with high resolution graphics and colour screens. His access to these machines and to discussion with those at the Centre who were computer knowledgeable, helped Thomas to develop his skill with computers. When the Centre moved, Thomas was one of three people loading and unloading the van. This assistance to others helps balance some needs that people at the Centre fulfill for him. The health needs of his family, his own desire to spend time working on his computer at home, and the rules governing receipt of welfare, including rules about attending "school", pose problems for him. Similarly, they pose a challenge to Sarah. She operates in such a way as to not interfere with his successful attempts to bend welfare rules. She counsels him in preparing letters to social workers and supervisors and arranges to send and receive the assignments that she prepares for him via email (Interview, 5/30/95).

Discussion

In her work and research with marginally literate women in Nova Scotia, Horsman (1990) suggested that these women were looking to literacy as a means of changing their home situation and their lives. In her attempts to classify kinds of resistance to adult literacy programmes (Quigley, 1992; 1993), Fingeret (1983) developed the theme that life crises were a common reason for adults choosing to return to school. Thomas' marriage and the birth of his children were personal identity crises that account in part for his registering in the Centre programme and staying with it. His obligations to family had become more complicated and he knew that the demands on his limited literacy would also grow. These events increased the weight of his responsibility. For example, he wrote:

> I have a family now so I didn't, want my kids growing up wondering why there father couldn,t read or write my wife susan is pretty good at reading and writing...My son is five and my daughter is four I started to wonder how would I explain to them that they have to go to school and stay in school if I don,t have my education. (Thomas, Autobiography, p.2)

Fingeret (1983) has suggested that the networks of adults with restricted literacy are intricately balanced, dynamic and usually under stress. The literacy needs of a marginally literate individual differ along various axes. Everyday literacy needs can be met by a variety of friends. More private needs, for example, a job questionnaire or a court summons, require hard decisions about the appropriate person to whom one might go for help. Frequency must be distributed so as to maintain a sense of symmetry and enable the reciprocity that allows marginally literate individuals to maintain their belief in their own independence.

In the past, Thomas had maintained his independence in relation to a network of friends and family on whom he could call to help him negotiate his literacy needs. These friends, on the other hand, could call on him to help them with his skills — particularly when it came to car repairs — thus minimizing his poor reading and writing abilities. Rod helped him with restaurant menus. If a bill of sale was needed when he did car repairs, his mother was available to write it for him. Now, his family filled his life. Much of this kind of life is by definition private. His own values demanded that he be the family "leader". He said:

> I'm older. I'm supposed to know this stuff. I'm the oldest. I'm supposed to be leading, but I'm backwards. (with vehemence) I'm following them. (Interview, 1/25/94)

The reciprocity and symmetry that a social network requires in order to operate could no longer be sustained under these circumstances. Therefore, Thomas decided that he had to improve his reading and writing to carry out his family responsibilities and maintain his independence.

Other reasons may also account for his decisions. If we accept Gee's (1989) conceptualization of literacy as nested in Discourse and his conclusion that it is virtually impossible to learn a secondary discourse in school, we can move toward another perspective on the question of why Thomas returned to schooling. Thomas provides an insight into how society reproduces itself in the dynamics of individual personality structure (Giroux, 1983)[3]. In spite of his resistance to his teachers labeling him as slow and his tenuous employment record, his perception that there is a link between literacy and decently paying long-term employment remains strong enough to inform his vision for his children's' future and his own actions in repeatedly returning to schooling.

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[3] The model has been available since the publicaton in 1961 of Fanon's Les damnes de la terre (The wretched of the earth). Fanon, a psychiatrist who treated both French and Algerian rebel troops during the Algerian War, describes how colonialism maintains itself with so few police and so little overt represssion: the colonized internalize the image of the oppressor. Fanon's solution: only by violently striking out at the colonial oppressor can one excise that image. In Canada, this was the rationale behind the measures embodied in Bill 101, the Act to protect the French Language in Quebec, that was enacted in 1977 by the National Assembly and introduced by the nationalist Provincial Minister of Culture, Camille Laurin who was also a psychiatrist.

How might this vision work? Schooling itself fills a child's horizon. One of the truths that it delivers about education is a positivist paradigm that knowledge is a thing, an object that is outside of the individual and that it can be received under the right circumstances. In other words, materialist metaphors of knowledge as an object that can be possessed, amassed and traded are used to understand knowledge and learning in relation to the individual. One consequence of accepting this particular understanding of the relationship of knowledge to the individual is that the onus is shifted onto the individual to be good enough to "get" an education. A critical distinction that is made and which has worked for Thomas is that although he didn't have an education, he could get one if he put his mind to it. After leaving junior high school and before Rod helped him, Thomas said that he doubted his ability to learn. He noted:

> I had trouble learning math writing and reading...There were a lot of students that were a lot smarter than I was...I thought I couldn't learn and that others would think that. (Interview, 1/25/94)

Rod renewed Thomas' belief in his own capacity to learn. Thomas said:

> My buddy had to teach me how to read. He taught me. I learned...Well, I realized after a while I could learn to read.
>
> ...I've come to accept it. I'm taking the time to learn it. I am learning and I know I can learn it. Five, ten years ago you couldn't convince me I could learn it. (Interview, 1/25/94)

Later, he believed that he was competing for an education on an equal footing with other "consumers" of education. With these assumptions, he could always find the optimism to renew his efforts to go to school and accept the responsibility for not learning a secondary discourse, without questioning the exclusionary and proscriptive characteristics of Secondary Discourses.

What is different about his history at the Centre is that he has not only stayed there much longer than he had remained in other schools but also that he has integrated himself into the community and is considered by others, particularly the Centre coordinator, to be a success there. In various ways, the Centre recognizes Thomas' worth. Sarah acknowledges his personal need to write and his enjoyment of the Centre computers by encouraging his participation in the writing group and by ensuring that the Centre staff are a resource for him when he needs guidance at the computer. She bends some rules and extends herself so that Thomas can do some of his school work at home with his own computer. The Centre staff and students accept Thomas and praise him for his contributions to the Centre community as a handyman, a computer resource person, a tutor, member of the Board of Governors of the Centre, and a participant in the Peer Tutoring Group. The Centre Newsletter and The Writer, as well as weekly Peer Tutoring Group meetings, and general Centre assemblies, provide opportunities for Thomas to express his critical perspectives on issues that are of interest and concern to him.

Chapter 5

PORTRAIT OF AN ADULT LITERACY LEARNER

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter I have fashioned a portrait of Thomas as an adult literacy learner. I have categorized Thomas' literacy in terms of the following four broad themes: his participation practices, his reading, his writing and his son's introduction to literacy. I developed the four thematic areas through continuous rereading of field notes and interview transcripts, searching for and attempting to confirm categories of literacy that defined Thomas' actions and the meanings that he attributed to his engagement in learning to read and write at the Centre.

First, I examine the nature of Thomas' participation in formal and informal literacy learning situations. In her discussion of how less literate adults safeguard their independence, Fingeret (1983) refers to participatory practices in terms of the creation of networks of support for the negotiation of everyday literacy needs. Jurmo (Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989) suggests that the degree of participation in decision-making in literacy learning contributes to success or failure in adult basic education programmes. The nature of Thomas' participation in Centre activities, and in literacy learning in general, and his purposes for doing so, are a strong motif in his attempt to become conventionally literate. Attendance at the Centre, activities engaged in there, time spent at home, and the search for compatibility between group and individual goals characterize the importance of participation to Thomas.

Second, I analyze Thomas' reading behaviour. He felt that he was not a competent reader according to accepted standards but he thought of himself as a reader. However, contrary to an intuitive and general understanding of less literate adults, I observed Thomas reading material that was of an advanced level of difficulty and embodied references to experiences and items with which he was familiar. He read regularly and with purpose and stated that the reading which he did supported important aspects of his life.

Third, I examined Thomas' writing. Thomas stated that he had come to the Centre to learn to write. He thought of writing as the mark of a person who was the equal of others. He spent a lot of his time writing different forms of text. Computers came to dominate and shape Thomas' involvement in writing and the Centre, his view of himself and his future, and his relationship with and support for his family. In examining Thomas' understanding of writing, I discuss the role of computers as tools for control.

Finally, I explore the family and intergenerational dimensions of Thomas' literacy and literacy learning. In numerous comments and in his writing, Thomas expressed his wish to see his children succeed in school. He viewed literacy as an important aspect of school success. He stated that being a positive model for Brian and Lynn was one of his motives for enrolling in the Centre programme. I address the issue of family literacy and the cycle of marginal literacy in an examination of Brian's literacy learning experiences.

Participation Practices in Literacy Learning

Overview

In this part of Chapter 5, I examine the nature of Thomas' participatory behaviour in literacy learning. Initially, I show how Thomas participated more fully in informal than in formal literacy learning opportunities both inside and outside the Centre. I subsequently discuss the significance of this finding within the framework of the concept of social networks and independence proposed by Fingeret (1983).

Jurmo (Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989) describes active participation in literacy learning in terms of a range of possibilities defined in part by the degree of control, responsibility and reward exercised and received by the literacy learner in the learning process. The most basic level of participation in formal literacy learning involves simple attendance or presence at a programme. A greater degree of control is represented by cooperation with the rules established by programme staff. Being consulted about instructional and/or course management is a higher level of involvement. Jurmo defines the highest degree of participation as some involvement in the control, responsibility and rewards associated with programme activity. In this regard he states:

> To participate actively in a literacy program, learners must do more than show up for classes and passively do what they are told. To participate actively, they must take on higher degrees of control, responsibility, and reward vis-a-vis program activities. (Fingeret & Jurmo, p. 27)

Jurmo developed this conceptualization to explore the possibilities of active, student centred learning in adult programmes. I use the concept more broadly to examine and gain a measure of the nature of Thomas' participation in literacy learning activity both in and outside of the Centre.

Control, reward, and responsibility can each be expressed as varying by degree. In my analysis of Thomas' participation in literacy learning opportunities, control is seen as ranging from Thomas only having control over attendance and whether he will or will not speak during an activity, to full or near full decision-making power resting with Thomas. Control over subject matter, timing, who is present, and teaching are not in his hands. Rewards for learning may be related to a community need or goal or to a personal achievement or skill acquisition. Responsibility for learning extends from self-initiated and planned activity to learning activities planned, offered and run by others.

The opportunities that Thomas took to engage in literacy-related learning activities spanned his day. Many took place at the Centre. Other literacy events occurred outside of it, primarily in his home. At the Centre, Thomas participated in different programmes and classes that were offered as part of its emerging curriculum. Thomas also participated in the daily life of the Centre community. In the evenings he devoted much of his time to his computer at home.

Thomas' literacy activity does not easily group itself into distinct "Within-Centre" and "Outside-of-Centre" categories. Some Centre related activities, such as essay writing assignments were at first faxed and later emailed to him by Sarah. These Centre initiated activities cross into the home environment. Time spent at the Centre working independently on one of its computer terminals approximates his involvement in literacy learning at home. From the perspective of degrees and kinds of participation in literacy learning, I have grouped Thomas' activities into two categories, "formal" or "informal".

I distinguish formal from informal activity based on the following criteria: structure, schedule, and nature of the group involved. Structure refers to the internal organization or the pedagogical rationale of the activity. Formal activity reflects the lesson planning or goal orientation of a leader with information to impart or skills to be taught. Informal activity is shaped more by the interaction of participants and objects and does not have an identifiable teaching structure. Schedule refers to the timing of the activity. Formal activity is organized on a regular schedule and occurs at the same or a predetermined and appointed time. Informal activity occurs more spontaneously and at the determination of the participants. With respect to the nature of the group, formal learning activities usually involve larger groups of people brought together involuntarily, i.e. who are recruited individually by a teacher or a course being offered as part of a curriculum. In informal learning situations, the group is often smaller - usually two people - who decide to meet on an ad hoc basis without necessarily having an overt or agreed upon learning purpose in mind.

Participation in Literacy Learning

Introduction

Thomas was involved as a student in a number of formal and structured programmes offered at the Centre. Two of these literacy-related programmes were the Peer Tutoring Project and the Men's Group. Both projects continued for more than two years. Thomas' participation in these programmes was more problematic than his participation in informal learning opportunities.

Thomas was one of seven students whom Sarah asked to participate in a Peer Tutoring Project at the Centre. She wanted to apply the idea of students tutoring students in the adult basic education setting together with the concept that students at comparable levels of reading and writing could profitably help each other. She considered these seven students to be among the success stories at the Centre - the strongest, the leaders, those who had been attending the Centre the longest and who seemed most committed to the programme.

The Peer Tutoring Project started in late winter 1994. Group meetings were the framework for helping the peer tutors to develop a community and pedagogical perspective on tutoring other students. In addition, and of equal importance, was the goal of helping the peer tutors develop their own reading and instructional strategies. The purpose of the project was to engage this cadre of students — some beginning readers and others more experienced in reading — in helping other students to learn to read and write better.

At the end of June 1994, a Centre women's group had been meeting for about one year. The group attracted many of the women at the Centre and was supported by Sarah and another woman who was completing a doctorate in adult education and was responsible for leading the group. The women's group was active. A patchwork quilt, to which many had contributed, attested to its vibrancy.

Initially, there was no "official" interest in supporting a men's group at the Centre. The men's group that did evolve began as a bicycle repair clinic. Men gathered to learn basic bike repair, went together to visit the City Bicycle Commuters group and met to talk about bicycles and other topics. In September 1994, at the beginning of the new Centre term, Thomas and Bob approached me to help organize a regular and structured Men's Group. During that year, the group met Monday afternoons from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., at a corner table in the Centre or in the Boardroom across the hall. Attendance fluctuated. Sometimes eight to ten men would attend; at other times three men would constitute the meeting. Thomas was one of the three men who formed the core, continuing members of the Men's Group. Even so, of the 23 meetings that were held in the period between September 1994 and May 1995, he was absent from seven sessions. However, except for Bob, his attendance was the most consistent. He reported his absences were due to his own illnesses (he had had a heart attack during this period) and to the illnesses of his children and his wife. The group twice visited places of interest in the city; we hosted a speaker and had a barbecue toward the end of the Spring term.

In both formal learning settings, while Thomas did not have decision-making power in structural areas of these activities, he did have some room for maneuver. He had more control over decisions made in the Men's Group than he did in the Peer Tutoring Project.

Formal Activity - Peer Tutoring

The Peer Tutoring Project was Sarah's creation. She researched the idea, wrote the grant proposal, chose the first group of peer tutors, scheduled the meetings, set the agendae and chaired the meetings. Thomas exercised his power to decide to join or not join the group and to a lesser degree to attend or not attend meetings. The limits on participants' right to be absent from peer tutoring group meetings were set by Sarah at an early stage of the project. When the first scheduled meeting of the group arrived, many of the chosen participants pleaded prior or superseding commitments. Sarah called a meeting immediately and required all those present to state their long-term commitment to the project. She emphasized the importance of the project as she understood it. She stated the need for each participant to decide one way or another about his or her involvement. Until that pivotal point, the Peer Tutoring Project might have gone the way of some other Centre group learning activities, such as the Learning Circle, which died out as students' priorities were shaped by the immediate demands of other people at the Centre or by other perceived needs by the students. Sarah's leadership at this point seemed to galvanize the group formation process. Although Thomas was absent from a number of meetings, in each case he was able to point to family and/or medically urgent reasons for not attending.

A typical example of such a meeting attended by Thomas included the following structure: Sarah's agenda listed "getting started"; letters from other peer tutoring projects; a visit by an official from the federal Secretariat of State for Literacy, and weekly tutoring schedules. These items were written by Sarah on a flipchart which sat to her side, at the head of the table. Sarah introduced each item and solicited responses by calling upon individuals. For example, she had brought to the meeting a cartoon about starting school. She asked Thomas to read it to himself and then to the group. He did so. During the second half of the meeting, Sarah introduced the topic of individual hopes and challenges and requested that each peer tutor state his or her views. Thomas, as well as other participants, responded to this request. Responses were generally no longer than two to three sentences. The final item on the agenda was Sarah's request that peer tutors commit themselves to a particular time during the week when they would be available to tutor other students.

The surface structure of this group activity suggests that Thomas' sense of control over his participation in the meetings was minimal. A closer examination of interaction during the meetings suggests that while this seems so and ultimately is so structurally, control as an aspect of participation that rests in the hands of the teacher or instructor cannot be taken for granted. The following excerpt from a Peer Tutoring meeting is characteristic of the interaction that took place during these sessions. Topics of discussion, such as "spelling" in the segment below, were regularly revisited:

> Me: The other issue with which I've had a problem is the one we were just talking about now, that is spelling... I don't consider it so important. But, I guess the question I always have when I'm working with a person is, well partially, should I correct the spelling but in a larger way, is it important to correct spelling? I mean, how important is spelling in some ways. Sometimes it's really important if a person is writing a letter applying for a job or a formal letter it's important because the form, how it looks is so important. Other than that, sometimes it's not so important, what's really important is not the form but that we are making meaning and communicating. If I can read a letter or I can read something that somebody writes and every second word is spelled wrong, does it really make any difference if that person has communicated something to me?
>
> Sarah: Donna, you were responding to that. Do you want to say some more of what you think...(Meeting, 2/22/95)

Most of the talk in these meetings was by Sarah and by me. Student voices were heard much less frequently. When heard, they seldom initiated discussion. Most often they spoke in response to a question, or an invitation to speak. In this excerpt, I raised the question of the nature of spelling, challenging the idea that it is "written in stone". There was no support for this view from the Peer Tutors. Five students responded to Sarah's invitation to give their opinion:

> Dorothy: It is, you know like if you, well if they don't learn the correct way, you know like later on in life they'll just continue, you know, continue spelling wrong. People can misinterpret. It's how you put it down.
>
> Sarah: What are others thinking? This is one of those kinds of questions where there's a lot of opinions on it so...
>
> Marny: Because I know another thing. If you don't practice, you know and they think it's right and so they trust you and stuff like that and its down the road ... and they're gonna say I should have listened before...
>
> Joy: That's how come they get to Grade 12. They can't spell, read or write.
>
> Dorothy: You know when you're going to school like that, you're just paying somebody else to write their exams and they're not really learning something.
>
> Heather: No, that's true.
>
> Me: Another point is whether the spelling communicates or not.
>
> Thomas: With me I think it's important to be able to do stuff properly, for instance, if you're ordering something and if you haven't got the spelling right and that person doesn't know what it is you're ordering, you could be waiting a long time to get it, (chuckles loudly). A lot of the words I couldn't spell then, later on, for what I knew they were spelled right then later on in life I got frustrated when people turned around and told me well no it's not right. Then I had to go learn it all over again. It's something that I thought that I had already learned.
>
> Dorothy: Well later on, you know, when you think about it, later on when we're looking for jobs it's important to know how to spell. (Tape transcript, 2/22/95)

Having been encouraged by Sarah to react to my comments, students responded by rejecting the image of the teacher as upholder of and advocate for a relaxed model of spelling. The structure of the talk now allows each student to "be heard" in turn and this also allows some resisting momentum to gather, as students seem to build in various directions on each others' comments. Of the students who elect to speak, Thomas is perhaps the most articulate. He raises two arguments. One alludes to the world of commerce, the other to personal feelings. Both are marshaled to support the importance of correct spelling. In one part of my statement, I refer to the outside world of formal letters and applications; in the later part of my comment, I focus on private communication. Both of Thomas' arguments are fairly direct rebuffs to these two parts of the statement that I initially made. As this segment illustrates, while Thomas had little control over most structural aspects of decision-making in the Peer Tutoring Project, he was able to struggle, to establish and to maintain his own beliefs about what constitutes literacy even within a context where he controlled little that was directly related to power at the Centre.

The reward offered to peer tutors was partially abstract. This intangible reward was that they were doing something worthwhile for the Centre and for other students. Most students at the Centre as well as the participants in the Peer Tutoring Project said that they enjoyed the prospect of being able to help other students or do something for the Centre. This sense of having a community goal for their actions and learning at the Centre existed alongside expressed personal goals. I do not believe that these two different kinds of goals were equally important to Thomas. He was generally committed to his personal aims and pursued them with vigour. For example, when Thomas spoke about the benefits of peer tutoring, he most often talked in terms of his own personal sense of reward. In response to a question on a verbally administered questionnaire that Sarah and I designed to gather information about participants' feelings about their involvement in the project, he said:

> It's been good. I'm reading with different people. I got ideas from other people. I'm happy. It's new. I enjoy doing it.... I look forward to it. I get ideas from it... I feel good to see them do it. It doesn't take a lot. Self-respect, knowing I could help other people. (Interview, 5/12/94)

This is not to suggest that Thomas did not see community goals as important. He said that he felt this was an important reason for participation. He wrote:

> There is one other part of the school I like and that is the peer tutoring we talk about How we can help new people. (Thomas, Autobiography)

Thomas' statements about the personal character of his goals and their relationship to his Peer Tutoring activities were not so much different as more clearly stated than the similar views of some other participants in the meetings. Sarah returned to probe the issue of personal and community oriented goals in a number of meetings. She stated it as a question of satisfaction, purpose or feelings about people's Peer Tutoring experience to date. In the comment below, Thomas responds to Sarah's request by describing what he has learned from Peer Tutoring:

> Well, it's practice for what you've learned too. If you've learned something and you help someone else with it, you're teaching them but you're refreshing yourself on what you've already learnt. You're still learning. You're still building up confidence in yourself for what you've learned. (Interview, 5/12/94)

In this comment, Thomas relates the question to his own goals. This is not to suggest that he did not see community goals in his actions. These stated community goals were an expression of the reciprocity that was important to him as a means of balancing the fulfillment of his literacy needs in and out of the Centre through help from others, and the help that he could provide to others, specifically helping or working with another student as a peer tutor.

Thomas' persona in these formal activities emerges again in this example from a Peer Tutoring meeting that took place in April, 1995. As usual, the agenda was created by Sarah. The meeting began with a preamble by Sarah which was followed by responses from the peer tutors, interlaced with guidance from Sarah:

> There are a couple of things I wanted to talk about... I think for me looking back over the year and a half there's a lot of things I've learned about all kinds of things working on the peer tutoring project. .. So really what we've been doing I think is building up some knowledge about peer tutoring and we've all been doing it together... the information wasn't out of a book somewhere. It was all in our heads and in our minds, our hearts, and things like that when we were creating that together. So I think that's one of the big things about the peer tutoring is that together we generated this information we can share with other people... over the last while what have we done together that has been useful for peer tutoring. (Meeting, 5/22/95)

Sarah's introduction to the meeting, of which this excerpt is a part, was long for a monologue. It took about two minutes. Among the interesting elements is her statement, beginning "...looking back over the year...". In this session, she wants to try to establish a definitive interpretation of the past year. Toward the end of this passage she ties this to a group goal and that goal is stated as community oriented in the sense that Sarah sees the rationale for this information generation as sharing with others.

In the interchanges that follow, first Dee and then Marny and Joy respond with "patience", (line 1) "relaxation" (line 9) and "communication" (line 18). There is firm guidance throughout this interchange from Sarah and at one point she changes the conversational frame (lines 25 & 26), causing some confusion for Marny, who, as a "graduate" of the Centre is among the more literate in the group:

1. Dee: Well, I'm starting, but patience.

2. Sarah: The patience is one of the things that tutors need to bring. And we
3. talked a lot in peer tutoring about things like patience. And for you to bring that
4. on up that's right on. I mean everybody brings up patience. So that's one of the
5. things we know about tutoring. What I'm trying to get at is in all the work
6. we've done together, like the tutoring, I've sat in on tutoring sometimes, we've
7. done workshops, had meetings together. What are some of the things we've
8. done together that have made peer tutoring start to work?

9. Marny: I think we're more relaxed and settled.

10. Sarah: More relaxed and settled than?

11. Marny: When we first started.

12. Sarah: So, being more relaxed and settled is of importance?

13. Marny: Yeah, take the workshop. The workshop really helped.

14. Sarah: So then Marny tutored so and so or Marsha tutored so and so.

15. Marny: No, I'm saying...

16. Sarah: Yeah. I'm just sort of underlying what you're saying. So as a group it
17. helps if the whole approach is kind of relaxed.

18. Joy: Communicate with one another.

19. Sarah: So that's one thing that you're learning from it or in order for it to work
20. you need to be able to communicate together. Which one are you saying Joy?

21. Joy: Communicate together.

22. Sarah: So one of the things that's important of peer tutors is that we
23. communicate. Let's talk a bit more about what that means.

24. Marny: We see that a student is restless, okay...

25. Sarah: Okay. That's between the student and the tutor. What about as a
26. group? What ways are important that we as a group communicate?

27. Marny: Well, we give them examples and we get advice.

28. Sarah: So part of the communication is sharing their experience and getting
29. advice. So that's an important thing for the whole group. See if someone else
30. has a couple of things to say. Let's go around the circle. Thomas if you think
31. back what's, what's you've been coming in every week and you tutor and
32. you're still part of the group. What's kept you coming back?

33. Thomas: I enjoy it.

34. Sarah: Pardon?

35. Thomas: For the enjoyment of doing it.

36. Sarah: So it has to be worthwhile. What's enjoyable about it? I'm going to
37. be really pushing on these questions today.

38. Thomas: Just talking with other people. Hear what they're doing. And if
39. they need help in doing what their doing.

40. Sarah: So if talking to other people is enjoyable for you then you need to have
41. opportunities to talk to people that you're tutoring. What's kept you coming
42. Philip?

43. Philip: Well, it gives me a chance to hear other ideas.

44. Sarah: So, if communication, sharing experiences, hearing from each other is
45. important, can you imagine a situation where peer tutoring wouldn't work?

46. Marny: If we didn't have meetings or a workshop.

47. Sarah: So meetings and workshops are important. So what we're starting to
48. build up is a picture of what is the programme for the people who want to start
49. up a peer tutor project. So, some of the things we need to start thinking about
50. are we can't just say okay, go tutor somebody but if we want it to work in a
51. way that suits everybody, then we have to...

52. Thomas: You could have students who are willing to let other students tutor as
53. well I haven't seen yet but I imagine there are some students who wouldn't
54. like it.

55. Sarah: You know, back before Christmas time we did some interviews...
(Peer Tutoring Meeting, 5/22/95).

At lines 28 through 32, Sarah attempts to salvage this reframing and the confusion it has caused. She links the previous idea expressed by Joy about communication to the community goal of sharing experience and getting advice. Then she asks Thomas to respond. He has been sitting quietly, without voluntarily joining the discussion being led by Sarah. At line 33 his response is different from those offered by his peers to this point in the conversation. It is concrete and it is highly personal. He simply enjoys it. Sarah is slightly thrown off course by this response, as her effort to gain some time with the marker "pardon" suggests. By line 36, she has regained control, and with reframing commentary in place (line 37) challenges Thomas on his assertion. His response at lines 38 and 39 expands his meaning of enjoyment to encompass the notion of informal networks of friends, with whom he can trade satisfaction of needs. Sarah then attempts to generalize his view and shifts to eliciting the response of Philip who is immediately followed by Marny, voluntarily forwarding her idea about the importance of meetings and workshops (line 46). This comment is followed by Sarah's summary of the students' comments to date within the framework of what she sees as the needs of the Centre community and of the Peer Tutoring Project participants. She casts her summarizing comments as a question of training, in which she suggests that tutors would be trained before having contact with students. At lines 52 to 54, Thomas takes a stand which is quite strong for a peer tutor in this situation. He rejects Sarah's idea that training is that important. He does so by falling back on a brief argument structured by a scientific logic that alludes to the inexhaustibility of probabilities and by content that legitimates itself by reference to the capability of students to make their own decisions.

As in the previously examined example, Thomas participated in a limited way in the formal learning activity of Peer Tutoring meetings. He had no power over the agenda or even over his attendance, except in the global sense of deciding whether he would be a peer tutor or not. If he wished to be one, he had little alternative but to attend. He did not engage in the discussion until it was well developed and then it was only when he was called upon by name by Sarah and asked to speak on a specific question that he did so. Thomas acted and spoke with ingenuity and a sense of confidence and presence that was not so evident in the behaviour of the other peer tutor participants. Nonetheless, Thomas felt it necessary to devote his time at this meeting to protecting his point-of-view rather than to engaging in learning or in contributing to the purpose of the meeting.

The limited character of Thomas' participation in the formal Peer Tutoring Project can be explained in terms of the different arenas and purposes of control that were operating in the project as they were expressed in the meetings described above. As he stated on numerous occasions, Thomas' attendance at the Centre and his involvement in the Peer Tutoring Project were aimed at personal goals. In part, he wanted to learn to read and write more competently in order to carry out the literacy requirements of a dog breeding business and later, of buying and selling refurbished computers. Thomas wanted to be in control of his life and future. Sarah wanted students to control their lives in the interests of communal goals. Sarah also wanted to maintain control of the meetings. Both Thomas and Sarah had a stake in the continuation of the Project. This accounts for much of Thomas' continued attendance. By attending these meetings, he could master more reading and writing skills. He continued to attend the meetings. Sarah controlled the meetings and advanced the community oriented goals of the Centre's community-based programme and philosophy. Thomas did not challenge Sarah's control of the meetings and was able to safeguard his goals with minimal and defensive participation in the meetings.

Formal Activity - The Men's Group

Thomas' participation in the Men's Group was similar in its control possibilities to his involvement in the Peer Tutoring Project except that in the former case, more control rested in his hands and was exercised by him. Meetings of the Men's Group often consisted of talk. Our talk centred on two broad areas: a.) the purpose and goal of the Men's Group, and b.) men's issues and our own histories in relation to them. In this latter respect, I believe that the Men's Group was the only forum in which Thomas and many of the other men who attended the meetings had actually ever spoken with other men, in public and frankly about their feelings of stress, loneliness, alcoholism, marriage, school failure and their childhood experiences, (Videotape, 11/95). The Men's Group shares a common characteristic with the Peer Tutoring Group in that the initiative is most often with the dominant person in the group, be it the coordinator leading the Peer Tutoring Group or the animator of the Men's Group. These leaders "define the situation" (McHugh, 1968).

As animator of the Men's Group, I advanced my agenda for the group. This agenda included some visits to local "sights" but emphasized group discussion about issues which I felt were important to confront if the men in the group were to become productive members of the Centre and of society. In my plans, literacy was to play an important role. I had chosen books which embodied ideas and themes with which I wanted to challenge the men in the group. I viewed discussion of readings from these books as occasions where Thomas and the other men in the group would be able to learn about themselves and what motivated their own behaviour. At the first group meeting, I introduced my agenda as a question about the direction in which the group would head. The men in the group, Thomas prominent among them, expressed a different vision for the group. He saw it as outward-directed, with a service club orientation. Raising money for the Centre and doing handyman work for the Centre were the objectives that he saw as central to the goals of a Men's Group.

These two expressed views of the Men's Group continued to clash through most of the year. During succeeding meetings, I structured the gathering by "seeding" discussion with readings from books that I thought might be of interest to the participants. Often this was the case and feelings and views were expressed. After reading a book about men's issues and male consciousness, a number of men expressed bitterness, resentment and fear of women's power over them. This theme wove its way through several meetings. On a number of occasions, Thomas also expressed similar feelings but in a manner that was less vehement than was common with some of the other men. For example, at the fourth meeting, a discussion about the brutality of the childhood of some of the participants was precipitated by readings from If You're Not From the Prairie (Bouchard, 1993). Thomas' memories were not pleasant but they were delivered with a detachment and amusement that was not conveyed in the voices of other men who became quite involved in the retelling of incidents from their childhood. Subsequently, I tried to focus again on childhood experiences but the group rejected this idea in favour of discussing men's sense of independence. When I advanced the idea that some men were fleeing responsibility, this was again rejected. The men are attuned to a different view. After discussing the meaning of Bob's description of how he keeps his home clean and cooks the meals because his wife will not pay attention to these matters, Thomas said:

> I do things that I like to, not because I have to. As a matter of fact, if you came and told me I had to do something, I'd tell you to go to hell. (Men's Group Meeting, 10/24/94)

Thomas elaborated on this statement. He pointed out that he was not trying to be defiant nor was he talking about politeness. He felt that people were equal and should treat each other in that manner and he would not go along with people who did not. This statement of his feelings about the character of relationships underlies much of his participation in formal group activities such as the Men's Group and the Peer Tutoring Project meetings, where there is an activity leader and where equality may be challenged by questioning basic viewpoints.

Some cynicism and a different idea of what is important in a man's life emerged during a meeting with Constable Knoop of the City Police Department. With the underlying purpose of trying to reform their lives, I saw the value of Constable Knoop's visit as an opportunity to shed light on the issues of alcohol, drug and spousal abuse. Thomas did not follow up on these issues. He chose to pursue the issue of panhandlers whom he described as being everywhere in the downtown area. He felt that they bothered honest citizens like himself, on the streets around the Centre and the Co-op in his daily trips to and from it. Thomas seemed to view the value of the policeman-speaker not as an authority figure from whom to learn but as a person who could address and possibly solve the concrete problems and irritations in his life.

Many of the subsequent meetings stretching into the Spring carried forward this issue of the relationship between women and men, in its various dimensions. Thomas rejected the concept of women and of male-female relations that I put forward. The core of my perspective was that the role of a man was not to take responsibility for a woman or women. Not only are women capable of caring for themselves, but the effort of sharing responsibility might lead to less stress in the men's own lives as they concentrated on trying to control themselves rather than trying to control other people and situations. Rejection of this idea often took the form of a series of stories in which Thomas and others reshaped and retold experiences that they had had with women, mostly their spouses. They felt the need to mistrust, resent and fear women while simultaneously declaring that it was men's role to protect them (undated tape-recorded Men's Group discussion). At another meeting, I presented the men with an article that I had written for the Centre Newsletter and in which I had painted a composite portrait of the experiences of some of the men in the group. Thomas asked that a portion referring to women be changed to reflect his own views. Other participants also rejected many of my descriptions.

Thomas' manner for exerting what control he could is illustrated in the following example. The subject of wives and women in general usually elicited strong opinions. Bob used violent language, particularly in relation to women, knowing that this was viewed as unacceptable by myself and by the other staff of the Centre. On several occasions he said to me that he "hated" people with university degrees. Thomas' approach was less overt. He responded to a story told by Bob about how he was fired from a job as a security guard at the Legislature after telling a youth that he wasn't allowed to climb trees. In the story, the youth's father was a powerful politician and demanded an apology from Bob. When Bob refused, he claims that he was fired. Thomas replied with the following comments:

> I've thought about the times I've done stuff just to save an argument. On a job or at home of wherever, if I'm on a job or something and I know something isn't going to work, if the guy with the white hat comes along and says do it this way, you can sit and argue until you're blue in the face about who's right and who's wrong , there's been times when it's happened and I've done what the guy said and then realized that it didn't work. The only part that really gets to me is all the time we wasted...A lot of times I say it all depends what situation you're in. (Men's Group Meeting, undated)

Here, Thomas expresses a view that does not preclude resistance or rejection. He states that he is certain that what is put forward will not work. Still, he understands, on the basis of his experience that straightforward defiance will backfire and that the work will be done in the end in the way that the person with power had decided it should be done. He puts his act of rejection on a practical basis; it will be wasted time. The power of resistance remains. This is clear in Thomas' final statement in which he does not exempt the idea of outright defiance but qualifies it situationally.

While many of these meetings produced strong emotions, the men may have felt that they were of some value as they kept returning to the sessions. On two occasions during this time (1/16/95 and 5/1/95), the meetings took a different and illuminating turn and achieved a different kind of success. Rather than putting forward an expressed or implied model of a man, I asked them, during the course of a discussion about food and clothing, what skills they used to survive on a monthly welfare cheque. Given the opportunity to show the value of their own models, they were happy to share secrets. Thomas told other participants where to buy 2-1/2 dozen peewee eggs for $1.69, where to go to buy cheap bulk cheese, and about an advantageous new pricing policy at Value Village, a local discount store.

The final meeting of the Men's Group that year was during the last days of the Centre's time at the old Coop building. It was one of our largest meetings. We gathered on the grass under a tree on the central downtown square and then moved to a picnic table. The agenda consisted of one item: planning for next year. Thomas contributed a number of ideas which he divided into learning activities and "for fun". Among learning activities, he suggested preparation of resumes, wills and other legal documents, men's rights and funding for the Men's Group as well as organizing an event like the Lobster Supper (an annual event sponsored by a church) to raise funds for the Centre. With respect to "fun" activities, he wrote that he wanted to go on bicycle rides, horseback riding, do some sports and go bowling and to the zoo (email, 6/23/95). There was no mention of talking about private feelings, about commitment, about women or male-female relationships.

On those occasions when I put aside the model of the "literate man" which was implicit in the goals that I had set for the group and in the manner in which I structured the meetings, the feeling of solidarity and community within the group was tangible. On these occasions, Thomas had the opportunity to present and demonstrate the value of his own lived experience, be it a location where cheese could be bought cheaply or about the functionality of the Bargainfinder, a local advertising weekly. Most often, however, he was put in a position of having to defend the model of "man" that he knew worked for him, against my model that he had to reject for its impracticality within his life.

In the Men's Group, the benefits of participation lay in two distinct areas. I was looking toward helping men to change their stance toward women and toward their involvement in the Centre. Thomas and other members of the group looked upon it as both a way of contributing as men to the Centre, via fundraising and handyman work, and to self-improvement and enjoyment through city tours. Thomas wrote:

> The Men's Group is for men to talk to each other, or what some of us like to think of, as a place for a friend to talk to a friend about different topics. Here are some of the things we would like to do as a group. Go to the conservatory, or as I call it the pyramids, or go to the Legislature Buildings and City Hall. (Thomas. Report on the men's group. Prepared for the Annual General Meeting, April, 1995)

Thomas has neatly labeled these two descriptions What Is the Men's Group? and The Future of the Men's Group, respectively. The former represents the Men's Group as I had organized and run it, with a community goal in mind. The latter reflects Thomas' view of a group devoted to more individual satisfaction. They co-existed for him as rewards for participation in this formal learning situation.

The form of resistance which Thomas took to my model included stories and demonstrations of his own competence in his areas of knowledge as well as a particular stance toward the challenge to his value of himself. During many of the Men's Group meetings, the participants would tell story after story, the one feeding off and leading into the other. It would be easy to see these stories as exaggerated bragging and dismiss them. Undoubtedly there was a strong element of bravado in them. I believe, though, that they served a number of other functions. The speaker was almost invariably the hero of his own story. This is the way that they wanted to see themselves and to be seen by me and by the other men in the group. Wanting others to see them as heroes may be in part to reinforce and communicate that the speaker himself has a strong belief in his own value. I found that these stories often consisted of "doing what was right". In this sense, I saw them as a form of morality play. Morality plays are a powerful and subtle form in which to communicate a rejection of the less heroic image of a man that I was asking them to accept.

Thomas' responses to these challenges also took the form of demonstrating his own competence and thereby affirmed the value and validity of his own model of literacy in his life. Whether it was sharing information about where to buy cheap produce, explaining the culture, organization and politics of his wife's reserve or stating that his son listened to him and to no one else, he was eager to do so when the situation allowed him the opportunity.

Ultimately, control of the Men's Group rested with me, as animator. I set the meeting dates and the agenda for each session. If I was absent, the meeting did not take place. During the meetings, I served as chairperson. In these areas, control was similar in both Peer Tutoring and Men's Group activity. In both, procedural matters were defined outside of Thomas' power. In matters of belief, Thomas was able to exert control over his right to maintain his own view of substantive issues such as the importance of conventional spelling and the purpose of the Men's group as well as his view of the role of men in the family and in relation to women.

The responsibilities and the rewards associated with these formal activities for the most part reflect the dichotomy evident in the nature of control in these settings. Thomas' responsibility extended to attendance and to making a reasonable effort to tutor other students. There was no compulsion to participate in discussion during peer tutor meetings with Sarah and the other tutors, although Thomas did speak up vigorously, as shown, when he was asked to do so. In both formal settings, Thomas did control his own ideas and views. In the Peer Tutoring Group meetings, this appeared to be more of a defence of these views. In the Men's Group, he asserted his views. The difference may be, in part, because in the latter setting, these views were made into the substance of discussion about the direction of the group whereas in the former they were incidental to the main purpose of the activity.

Informal Activity

Thomas' participation in informal literacy learning activity inside and outside of the Centre lies between Jurmo's highest and penultimate form of participation (Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989). In access to and use of computers at the Centre, Thomas was subject to the rules established for fair access for all. He was consulted about their use and was commonly referred to by Sarah and others as the "computer expert" at the Centre. His well-entrenched independence led him to attend to his network of friends and supporters at the Centre. He gave and he received. As a participant in many programmes, as a friend to most students and as a help when skilled work was needed, as in the case of the video wiring or when an extra pair of hands were needed to operate the video machine, Thomas participated in literacy learning and built up his side of the ledger. Thus, when he wanted to take complete responsibility for and control of his learning by staying at home to work on upgrading his computer, preparing essays for the Newsletter, "cruising the internet" or composing and sending email messages, he and Sarah jointly made the decision for him to work and learn in this way. Outside of the Centre, Thomas created his own literacy programme and staffed it as he wished. He recruited Eugene, set the agenda and earned the rewards associated with coming to know and to use his computer to communicate with others.

Outside of the Centre, Thomas built one network of support around his involvement with computers. Thomas had developed his interest in computers at the Centre. He was first attracted to them to play Solitaire. He did this on many occasions during the winter of 1993/1994 when I was first getting to know him. In September 1994, he acquired an older model computer for himself from his landlord in place of a refund owing to him. He invited me to his home to help him set up this computer. Subsequently, I became a regular source of advice for him and a person to whom he was interested to show and discuss the many upgrades that he did to it. Our relationship was one of balanced mutuality. I helped him to decipher computer manuals and on-screen instructions and introduced him to the conventions of computer-related literacy. He opened his life to my observations and his opinions, recollections, and reflections to my tape recorder and my laptop computer.

With my own family to attend to, I was not always available to Thomas to help with the setup of his computer when he had the time to do so. Thomas met Eugene through the Bargainfinder, a classified advertisement weekly paper that he used extensively. Thomas bought a piece of computer hardware from Eugene and in negotiating the purchase, was able to have labour included in the price. Afterwards, continued small purchases went hand in hand with Eugene's involvement. Thomas worked with Eugene in his basement computer room late into the night on many occasions:

> It would have been last Thursday that we started. He came over that night and started to take the computer apart and started to make a bracket inside for the hard drive. Then we got it all put in. The hard drive was working but we couldn't get the mouse to work. So, we had to reroute the cards inside, to bypass one of the ports. I was there with him explaining... we finished at about 2:00 a.m. Started at about 5:00 p.m. We couldn't get it to go that night so we started again. As a

> matter of fact it was three nights before we could get this mouse to work... We tried to put it on high density discs but it wouldn't accept it. That was another day that we couldn't get nothing done. We couldn't get the discs to work. There were 14 different discs. It took us from Thursday night to Thursday night - six nights - 5 p.m. to midnight or 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. (about 42 hours). (Interview, 31/5/96)

Eugene did not do the work for Thomas. They worked together. Thomas assisted and learned to do the work himself:

> Whenever we did up the discs, I was labeling them (my own so that I would know what was on there myself). He would tell me what they were because he knew exactly what was on their backup discs. So that if we ever had a power failure I could boot the system right back up again. He showed me an easy way to format them on a piece of paper and then tape it to the disc. I would stand there reading the stuff that came up on the computer reading the diagrams to find out what works and what wasn't working. He gives examples - programming for the mouse, unsuccessfully. They had a mouse problem. Maybe I got a bad mouse. He brought his over, hooked it up, still wouldn't go so we had to tear it all apart again, take the controller out and move the jumpers. Now I can run 2 printers, the mouse, 2 game ports. (Interview, 31/5/96)

There were questions that Thomas felt more comfortable asking me and times and places — like the Centre or over the phone — when and where he was more inclined to do so. Similarly, he used Eugene's services and possibly offered him friendship in return and the pleasure in solving computer problems that people who are interested in technology enjoy working on together.

In informal learning settings, Thomas was not in full control of decisions about literacy (computer) activity in which he participated. He had to negotiate with the person whom he had asked for help about when and where they would be willing to work with him. Often, it was his preference that governed the decision. The activity was determined by him as he initiated the interaction, or he was able to choose to respond or not respond to a request. For example, the more formal Peer Tutoring project consisted of two distinct activities, one more structured than the other. Peer Tutors were expected to attend weekly group meetings where they discussed how to help others learn to read. The second activity was actually tutoring other students. Non-attendance at formal group meetings was a sign that a person was not interested in being involved in the project or in being a Peer Tutor. Thomas' attendance record was strong. Although an attempt was made to schedule the weekly tutoring being done by peer tutors, this proved unsuccessful. The ad hoc nature of the activity, the number of peer tutors and the spread of possible tutoring times across the week combined with busy staff schedules made it difficult to structure and supervise actual tutoring. In this less structured setting, Thomas' involvement in actual tutoring was incidental. In the same setting and during the same time period, he invariably responded positively when asked to help solve a technical problem with a computer terminal or a video camera or to help another student access applications on a computer terminal at the Centre.

Thomas' interest in computers by itself cannot account for these decisions, as he was free to use them while at the Centre. I believe that the informal structure eliminated the threat that he felt to his independence and allowed him to feel in control of and to respond positively to other students' requests for help with computers. In the informal learning settings, Thomas was required to take responsibility for his own learning and did so, while at the same time promoting his own singular interest in computers. The rewards associated with his control of his own participation and its emphasis on computers, particularly since he owned one himself, were very individual, rather than community or group oriented.

Discussion

Thomas' participation in literacy activity at the Centre and outside of it is characterized by its variety, subtly and vibrancy. In this respect, it is unlike the picture of the adult basic literacy learner that inhabits much of the research. More recent post-structuralist perspectives (Collins, 1995) that focus on the enactment of literacy help to open to exploration the actual interaction of literacy learning in programmes. We can describe Thomas' participation in literacy learning in part as a process of resistance (Giroux, 1983; Quigley, 1993). It is less a resistance to authority than it is a rejection of a model of the literate man that is put forward from within the ideology of the Centre. Thomas rejects this model for its impracticality for his negotiation of survival and for the value that he imputes to his own understanding of the role of literacy in his life. His rejection of this model is not overt. Its subtlety reflects his capacity to restrain anger and defiance in the interests of longer range goals and in recognition of the co-constructed and situational nature of the challenge to his views of himself and his response to it. Resistance is not an adequate account of his participation in literacy learning although his strong sense of independence ties his resistance to his capacity to create, develop and maintain a symmetrical and reciprocal social network, particularly through the Centre. In this way, the Centre affords him the opportunity to engage in complex, extensive and satisfying literacy learning as well as simple survival.

Fingeret (1983) suggests that adult educators must revise their understanding of adults who are marginally literate to appreciate that many of these adults, whom we usually consider to be dependent and passive, are full and integrated participants in their communities. She suggests that, in some communities, literacy is but one set of skills among many that are useful. She observes that marginally literate adults can maintain their independence and their capacity to negotiate daily life by cultivating a network of contacts upon whom they may call, depending on the nature of the reading and writing task at hand, to help, in return for their help with something that the literate helper may himself need at another time.

Thomas grew up in a Newfoundland family culture that Fagan (1993) has described as demonstrating the limits of print literacy: in many Newfoundland communities, face-to-face, oral communication hedges and buoys up print. Kitchen-table community helps to give meaning to the everyday negotiation of survival in a way that print often does in other Canadian communities. Fagan (1993) describes how news of special pricing at the local grocery store/supermarket in Newfoundland is conveyed from person to person and family to family via face-to-face talk or over the telephone. By contrast, my mailbox overflows with flyers to be read to inform me of specials at the local supermarkets, cub and brownie bottle drives, houses recently sold on my block, community league news, and calls-to-arms to save the local ski hill from the depredations of the city parks and recreation bureaucracy! They are all delivered silently and invisibly. My only conversation is with the print.

Thomas reports that, until he was married, he relied for help with his literacy needs on his mother and siblings and on the network of his brother's friends who adopted him, accepted his difficulty reading and writing and helped him to master the formulaic aspects of reading that would allow him to do things like find street locations and read a menu (Interview, 1/25/94). In return, he was a loyal and fun friend who could also lend a knowledgeable hand at car repair. Within this community, his skills were as important as were the literacy skills of others on whom he relied.

After Thomas was married and became a father, his network of friends was less accessible to him. In a daily log that he maintained for a period of time, Thomas described a typical Sunday. The better part of the day was taken up with going to buy groceries at the "Superstore":

> ...First thing I did when I woke up is have a shower then I went and had my morning coffee... Whell Susan whants to go grocher shoping so of to the superstore we go in lawe is going with us so in the truck we go of to spend spend and spend... Now we have evreything unlowded we have to put it all away... Susan whanted a depfreezer for awiyl so we looked in the bargain finder... so of we to to look at the depfreeze. Its away over in Kaseldowens [far side of the city]... the hard part came where we got home with the depfreeze.. so now we have to take the lide of the depfreeze so it will fit in the door... We got the depfreeze in the sun room now... Now its time to relax for awile and watch some TV about an hower latter one of the guys that whants to by one of the pups stoped by to show his wife... it is ten after nine pm oh mahbe I will go get a nothe coffe and see what else I can do... whaching sharon and the girls play nentendo... maybe I'll have a muffin and thent a night. (Thomas, Daily Log, February 26, 1995)

This day, which is not very different from the Sunday of many suburbanites and city dwellers, contrasts with his younger days, which he described as having been spent in the company of Rod, his brother's friend, working on car engines and gathering with others at restaurants:

> At first he didn't know that I couldn't read. I used to cover it up all the time. Like we went to a restaurant and he'd pass me a menu and say order whatever you want and I used to just look at the menu. I didn't know what it said on it... Then he caught on that I couldn't read... and he says if you have trouble reading tell me about it so I told him and he started helping me. (Interview, 1/25/94)

In this network, he could call upon Rod to help him with his literacy in the course of daily life. Now, his days were taken up working and attending to family matters (Katz & Malicky, 1994; Fingeret, 1983). At work the rules of networking were more limited and he described harrowing and complex attempts to deal with his inability to read and write adequately, for example (Chapter 4 above, page 66), in his reference to the strategies that he used to respond to the need to complete baggage forms for customers while working at a service station. He also described (interview, 1/25/94) his embarassment at asking his mother to write a bill-of-sale for a car which he sold. He also recounted how his illiteracy almost caused him trouble:

> ... I got hassled by a cop one time cause of the way I signed my name. When I sign my name I don't know about now, but years ago, I'd never sign it the same way. The printing wouldn't be quite right. The cop he was going to take my license away from em because of the way my name was signed. I got into a ruckus with him. I told him, I said, sign your name a hundred times. How many times does it come out exactly the same? He didn't know what to do so he handed my license back to me. By, that really freaked me out. I thought I was

> going to lose my license and everything over just the way my name was signed. (Interview, 1/25/94)

At home too, he found that he was having more difficulty negotiating his days without literacy and without a network of support into which he could fit. For example, he described his frustration at not being able to write a note to his wife to tell her that he was going to the donut shop for coffee, when he woke early on the weekend while she was still asleep.

The Centre is a meeting place for a diverse group of people - students, volunteers and staff - with different skills. The flexibility of the Centre community means that literacy learning possibilities are usually available or can be created to satisfy need. One person was working on PLATO; the Men's Group was meeting in a corner of the room; the women's group was meeting in the Alcove, listening to a speaker; some students were talking and smoking in the smokers' niche down the hall; Bob was standing near the alcove listening to the police constable talking to the women's group about violence and women; two students were engaged in one-on-one peer tutoring; Depac was searching for a phone number in the telephone book; a student was the receptionist, seated at the front desk, answering the phone; a student was reading the newspaper; a woman was being interviewed and tested at the round table in the staff area; Tillie was cleaning the kitchen area; Wendy was organizing her papers; another student was reading her own written work; another student was reading a book. With few exceptions, students were involved in talking with other students. Staff, including paid workers and volunteers were intermingled with students, listening, tutoring, working with them or helping them with their projects. For Thomas, the Centre acts as a setting in which he can make and maintain a social network, avail himself of the literacy skills of some people and adequately balance the literacy needs that are filled there with his own contribution to the Centre.

Fingeret (1983) observes that while marginally literate adults may be unable to read or have great difficulty reading print, they constantly read the social world. In many areas this was the case with Thomas. In some areas, he was also astute enough to recognize his lack of experience and skill in dealing with important situations. As a welfare recipient, Thomas was involved in a web of obligation, rules and fears of sudden and, to him, unexplained and arbitrary action that would leave him without any money with which to feed or house his family. He worried about this predicament (Videotape, Men's Group meeting, 1/96). My involvement with Thomas' social network went beyond support for his computer literacy efforts and extended into this area of literacy related to responding to government forms. Thomas viewed this task as a very private matter and not one for which he could turn to many people for help. As a friend, an outsider to his family and a "professional" in his life, he could request my assistance with this kind of literacy need and he did so on three separate occasions. My role as the literacy support in sensitive areas extended to providing medicine and some financial support when he was desperate and to intervening to mediate his son's problems in school. Thomas was not a dependent. For example, when I needed help in building a fence, it was to Thomas that I turned and we spent a cold, wet and muddy ten hours digging post holes, measuring and erecting a fence.

The notion of independence and illiteracy distinguishes between cosmopolitan and local marginally literate adults. They can be represented as being on a continuum based on the extent of their contact with institutions, norms and systems of literate society. Thomas' poverty and his dependence on social welfare would seem to identify him as a local, yet independent, person. He works hard to maintain an integrated and balanced network of support for his literacy learning. In a sense, his informal participation in the Centre helps him to transcend limitations in his existing networks. In this case, the Centre was the seed ground of his involvement with computers, the staff and other students. I became a part of the network that helped him develop the computer skills necessary to continue to expand his network through email and the internet.

Conclusion

I introduced the discussion of the nature of Thomas' participation in literacy learning with an exploration of his engagement in the informal and formal aspects of literacy. Fingeret's notion of social networks as a means of negotiating independence helps to show how Thomas exerted control over and took responsibility for his literacy learning along the narrow and occasional seams that appeared in the interaction in the formal classes that he attended, at home in his basement computer room and at the Centre, mostly around the computer terminals and among his fellow students. When the extent of Thomas' self-help is calculated, it is interesting, as Brodkey (1992) points out, that a main thing that differentiates "them" from "us" is our ability to pay for the services of an accountant, lawyer, computer repairperson, and mechanic and Thomas' inability to do so.

In introducing the discussion of Thomas' participatory literacy practices, I referred to Jurmo's measures of control, responsibility and reward as defining important facets of full participation in organized literacy learning programmes. According to these measures, Thomas participated strongly in the Centre programme. He attempted to exert control over his learning environment and did so successfully in a number of instances; he initiated many of his own learning activities, and he sought and occasionally received personal and private rewards for his efforts. Thomas' successful participation in these terms actually led him out of the Centre programme. When I first met Thomas, he was introduced to me and included in the initial study as a Centre "success" story. He was seen as successful because he stayed at the Centre. At that time, my definition of successful participation was based on commitment to the Centre programme. Further exploration suggested that successful participation may embody the notion of outgrowing the Centre. The contrast between these two views may be an index of the uneasy co-existence of the concepts of participation and of independence among the literacy definers who operate adult basic education programmes.

This analysis of Thomas' pattern of participation in formal and informal literacy learning highlights the transferability of social networks to adult learning settings and how, under certain circumstances, they can work to support adults trying to learn to read and write better. Before marriage Thomas relied on a network of family and friends in which he located himself, maintaining his independence without literacy skills. After marriage, his network of support became less accessible and more needed. The Centre offered possibilities for developing a new network. Thomas was able to transfer his network building and maintenance skills to this setting in order to satisfy his literacy learning needs. This transference seems to work more effectively in informal rather than more formal learning settings.

Within educational contexts and particularly in adult literacy programmes, the twin notions of full participation and of student independence can be uncomfortable intrusions. It often seems that our "teacher" satisfaction demands perpetually dependent students who participate in prescribed ways. Jurmo's (1989) conception of participation acknowledges the centrality of independence as a defining characteristic and motivation of less literate adults. The nature of Thomas' participation in Centre activities and in literacy learning, in general, was governed to a large degree by his desire to re-establish his independence and to guard it. Programmes that define participation less comprehensively or that do not allow for student decision-making or "opting out" (as

Sarah did with Thomas), challenge the individual's wish for independence. The irony is that in leaving the Centre programme behind or in challenging its limits, Thomas is demonstrating his success as a student in the Centre programme.

Reading

Overview

In this section, I review Thomas' behaviours as a reader. I look at the material that he read between November 1993 and December 1995, and include my observations from field notes about his reading in the social context in which it took place. I examine and compare this material in light of his recorded thoughts about his own reading in order to establish how he sees himself as a reader and what reading means to him.

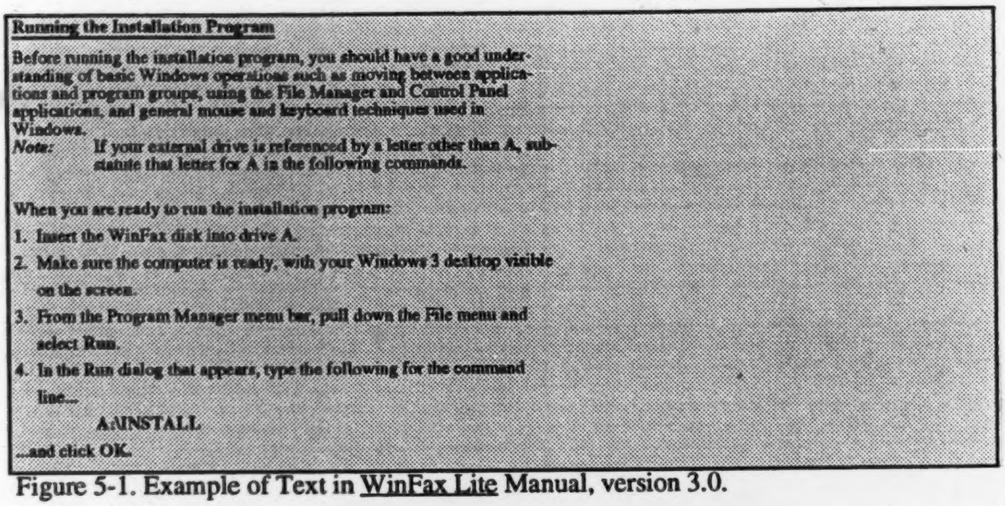
What Thomas Read

Materials

I made a list of all the print with which I knew Thomas was involved. Material for the list was drawn from field notes and interviews and other informal sources of information, including Sarah's observations. The list yielded the following categories of print material:

1. Instructional Manuals: Included in this category were, for example, a manual on the operation of a portable phone that Thomas had acquired from his wife's cousin. Thomas bought and read from a series of books about different breeds of dogs. These were highly specialized books containing practical information for dog breeders. Thomas also read and worked with computer manuals. Among these were instructional booklets for applications software as well as manuals for hardware installation. These items included, for example, the Winfax manual (Winfax Lite 3.0, 1993), and the Windows 6.0 (Microsoft, 1993/94) and the Word For Windows (Microsoft, 1993/94) manual as well as instructions which he read from his computer screen during installations or when he accessed the Help function. Figure 5 - 1 illustrates a page from the Winfax manual to which Thomas often referred.

2. Advertising. Thomas read advertising material. While I was in his company in public places, he seemed not to notice or to comment on public advertising. However, he did receive advertising literature in the mail and read it selectively. For example, he was on the mailing list of a company that sold parts for computers. Periodically, he received a mailer from them. Occasionally, he brought these brochures to the Centre where he could read them at his convenience. Thomas read the classified ad section of the local daily newspaper. He read the Bargainfinder, which is a classified ad publication. Figure 5 - 2



Running the Installation Program

Before running the installation program, you should have a good understanding of basic Windows operations such as moving between applications and program groups, using the File Manager and Control Panel applications, and general mouse and keyboard techniques used in Windows.

Note: If your external drive is referenced by a letter other than A, substatute that letter for A in the following commands.

When you are ready to run the installation program:

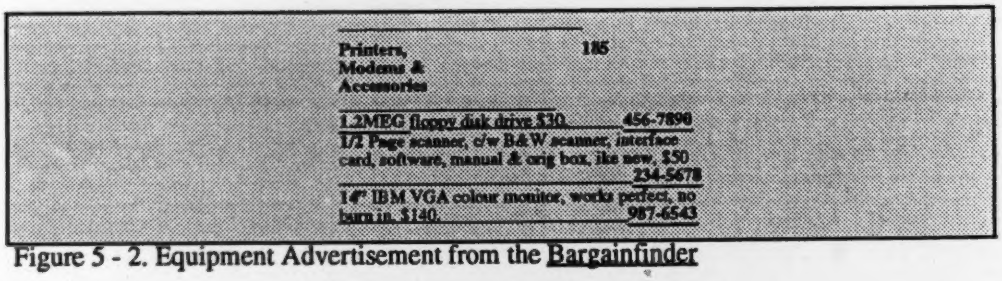
1. Insert the WinFax disk into drive A.
2. Make sure the computer is ready, with your Windows 3 desktop visible on the screen.
3. From the Program Manager menu bar, pull down the File menu and select Run.
4. In the Run dialog that appears, type the following for the command line...

```
A:\INSTALL
```

...and click OK.

Figure 5-1. Example of Text in WinFax Lite Manual, version 3.0.

and 5 - 3 are examples of ads that Thomas encountered in the Bargainfinder.



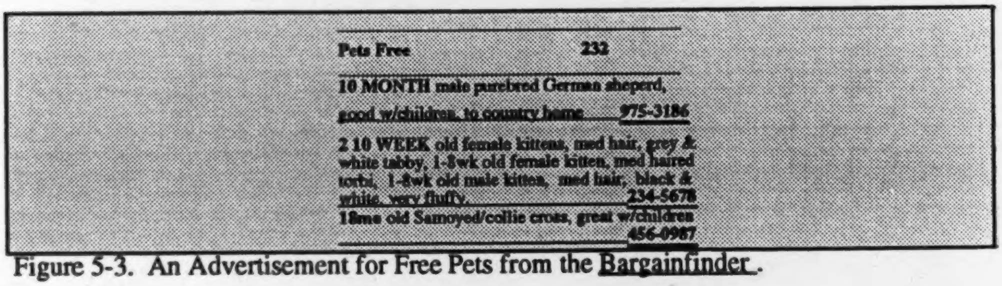
Printers, Modems & Accessories 185

1.2MEG floppy disk drive $30. 456-7890

1/2 Page scanner, c/w B&W scanner, interface card, software, manual & orig box, ike new, $50 234-5678

14" IBM VGA colour monitor, works perfect, no burn in. $140. 987-6543

Figure 5 - 2. Equipment Advertisement from the Bargainfinder



Pets Free 232

10 MONTH male purebred German sheperd, good w/children, to country home 975-3186

2 10 WEEK old female kittens, med hair, grey & white tabby, 1-8wk old female kitten, med haired torbi, 1-8wk old male kitten, med hair, black & white, very fluffy. 234-5678

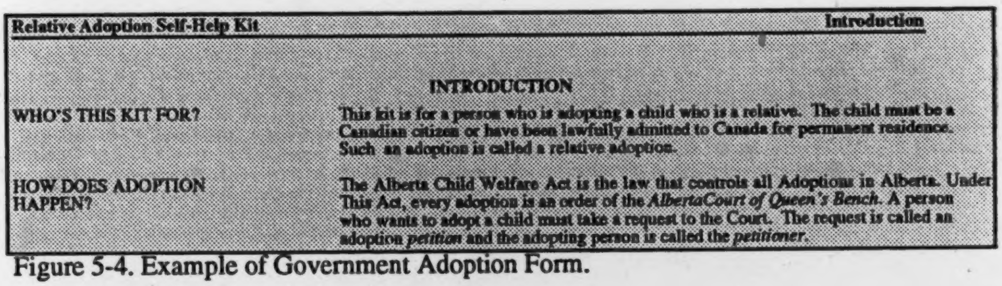
18mo old Samoyed/collie cross, great w/children 456-0987

Figure 5-3. An Advertisement for Free Pets from the Bargainfinder .

3. *Government Forms.* People who are on social assistance must deal with the government on a regular basis and are subject to bureaucratic procedures. These often include completion of different forms. Thomas dealt with his income tax form, with a form concerning a demand by his caseworker that his wife attend upgrading courses, with

a form supplied by his financial worker to regulate payment of daycare fees for his children during the summer when both he and his wife were required to be either searching for work or working or studying full-time, and a form which Thomas sought from a government department in order to adopt his nephew.

Figures 5 - 4 and 5 - 5 show the text and format of the adoption forms which Thomas was required to complete in order to begin the adoption process.

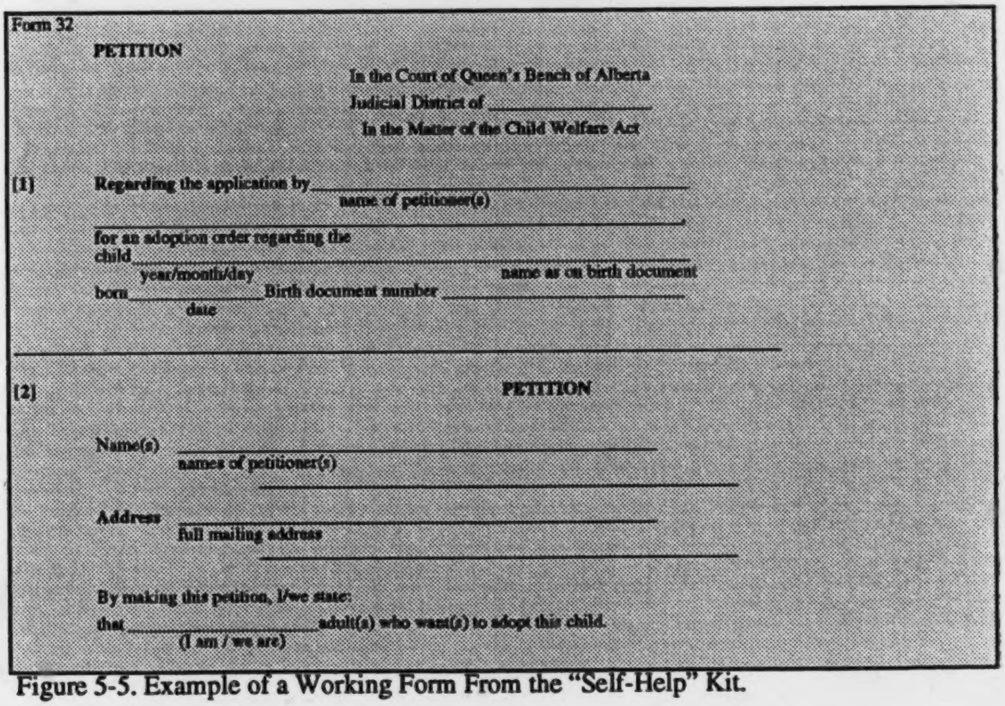


Relative Adoption Self-Help Kit **Introduction**

INTRODUCTION

WHO'S THIS KIT FOR?	**This kit is for a person who is adopting a child who is a relative. The child must be a Canadian citizen or have been lawfully admitted to Canada for permanent residence. Such an adoption is called a relative adoption.**
HOW DOES ADOPTION HAPPEN?	**The Alberta Child Welfare Act is the law that controls all Adoptions in Alberta. Under This Act, every adoption is an order of the *AlbertaCourt of Queen's Bench*. A person who wants to adopt a child must take a request to the Court. The request is called an adoption *petition* and the adopting person is called the *petitioner*.**

Figure 5-4. Example of Government Adoption Form.



Form 32

PETITION

In the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta
Judicial District of __________________
In the Matter of the Child Welfare Act

[1] **Regarding the application by____**
name of petitioner(s)
____,
for an adoption order regarding the child____
year/month/day **name as on birth document**
born________________Birth document number ____________________________
date

[2] **PETITION**

Name(s) **____**
names of petitioner(s)
____

Address **____**
full mailing address
____

By making this petition, I/we state:
that_______________________adult(s) who want(s) to adopt this child.
(I am / we are)

Figure 5-5. Example of a Working Form From the "Self-Help" Kit.

This section of the Self-Help Kit is labeled "Part 1". It contains 32 pages of instructions including a description of who is eligible for adoption, the contents of the kit and the use of the kit. The body of the text of Part 1 describes the nine steps involved in the process required by government for legal adoption status. There are a two page glossary of terms used in the kit and the process of adoption. There are three appendices. Appendix A of the government form reproduces the sections of the Alberta Child Welfare Act that are relevant to adoption. This appendix is thirteen pages in length. Appendix B lists the addresses and telephone numbers of all district offices of Alberta Family and Social Services. There is a separate heading in this section for offices of Aboriginal Child Welfare Agencies. Appendix C provides information on sittings of the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench

4. *Stories.* Thomas read stories. These included primarily books with both print and pictures. The average grade level of these stories was mid-grade seven. The stories ranged in subject matter, with a portion of them devoted to native and outdoor themes, humour and fairy tales. A list of books read by Thomas is included in Appendix E of this document.

Text Complexity

The complexity of the text that Thomas read varied. The Bargainfinder poses particular interactional challenges to the reader. It is described on its front page as an "Edmonton & Area" classified publication. It is published once each week, appearing early on Thursday mornings. It presents the appearance and size of a tabloid newspaper, measuring 8'1/2" across by 11-1/2" down when folded along its spine. This is the way in which it is packaged but it is read by unfolding and opening it so that when opened, it is 23" across by 17" down. There is a picture on the front, together with the masthead and an ad for a scrap metal recovery company in a one inch band along the bottom. Both sides of the front cover of the front section contain graphics, the back of the first page of the front section being a colourful ad for a car stereo company. When open, the paper must be turned and read with the pictures on the front cover now at a 90^0 angle. Each page of each section is numbered beginning with page 1. Readers are guided to the classified ads they wish to look at by an index found on page 4 of the front section. Product categories are arranged alphabetically, in bold type. The index lists 384 main product categories including, for example, Air Conditioners, Bedding, Engines, Ice Sporting Goods, Televisions, Wheels, etc. Some categories are further divided. For example, "Autos" are listed separately by year in 22 different categories organized by year between 1975 and prior and 1996. "Pets" are subdivided into six sections, from "Exotic" to "Free" to "Supplies". Some categories are for paid ads. These categories are denoted by an asterix that is indicated at the top of the page. For each category, a section number is given. The issue contains a front section and three additional sections (numbered sections 1, 2 and 3). Each section is self-contained, folded and organized in the same way as the front section described above. When open, the immediate impression is of a large amount of print, in an 8 point, sans serif Helvetica style of font, organized in columns of six to each page so that the reader confronts twelve columns when the paper is open for reading. There is normal print, supplemented by a considerable amount of bold print usually leading off each ad, which is on average about two lines and 10 words in length. Often, the contact telephone number in the ad is also in boldface type. Some ads are all in boldface. Sections are marked by solid lines above and below the heading and the heading itself is in a larger font size - 18 points. Pages vary in the degree to which there are medium sized paid commercial ads. Interested readers would proceed through the paper or leapfrog sections to arrive at the category for which they were looking. Categories are organized consecutively across sections.

Although conforming more closely to the physical conventions of print - i.e. a book in linear form - computer manuals also represent a considerable degree of language complexity. They are written in a shortened form of the language that relies on numbered lists of commands and heavily on terminology and alphabetic symbols as well as on the formatting of print on the page in a way somewhat similar to what is found in the Bargainfinder but in a simpler visual form. Of greater difficulty is that the language of computer manuals, which is a secondary discourse in its own right, makes little sense if one is not initiated into the meaning and inter-relationships of concepts within it.

While texts noted above were complex, the forms and the narratives which Thomas also read were more straightforward. The stories, such as North country night (Sans Souci, 1990) were generally at a grade 6 or 7 readability level (Vacca & Vacca, 5th ed., 1996). The forms Thomas was required to read were generally written in plain English, which is usually defined as being at a Grade 5 reading level. In the narrative, text is supported by detailed pictures and by story structure. The forms are less graphically complex than what is found in a computer manual and certainly presented in a format that is easier to follow than what is found in the Bargainfinder.

Contexts for Literacy Events and Literacy Practices

Computer Manuals. Thomas began his outreach to the world of literacy by installing a fax. He did so with minimal help. He referred to the manual cited above. This wasn't the only or the first software that he installed. He had previously installed two other programmes, both of which he had received as gifts from his landlord. The fax software installation was followed by other hardware and software, including Windows and Word for Windows 2.0 together with software to support email and internet communication. These installations became a continuous set of literacy events which took place in the evenings, in his basement "computer room". On several occasions Thomas invited me to view his accomplishments in upgrading his computer or to help him with a specific problem which he felt he could not solve. More often, Thomas worked for long hours doing these installations with Eugene. On occasion, he phoned me to ask about an installation step that he did not understand or that had not worked out as he thought the manual said it would. During these sessions, Thomas took the role of a learner and helper. He was an astute student. Within months, Thomas was doing his own installations, proceeding by trial and error. Eventually Thomas felt comfortable enough and was so occupied with his computer that he attended the Centre less and did what writing he wished to do (together with reading) alone during the day on his computer in the isolation of his computer room. Part of this time was devoted to exploring the internet and to responding to internet messages.

Another kind of computer related literacy event occurred when Thomas would demonstrate his computer to family and friends or tutor them in the use of software. In explaining how understanding particular words was a problem for him, he described how he negotiated this kind of print situation:

> Like the programme I'm learning now, Windows for the computer. There's one section in there on doing pictures and I have another guy, a friend of mine that I was teaching how to use a lot of the stuff. When I read it in the manual it didn't make sense to me or to him. So what I done, I learned it by trial and error. I just go ahead and start punching it in till I figured it out. Then I wrote it out in my words and in my way and I showed him that way and he says oh, OK now it makes sense...
>
> I got to the basics. I didn't beat around, use strange words. Like when you want to save DOS I says all you do is you go into File go down to Save. Give it a file name. He said OK. Then it will either save to your hard drive or if you want to go to your floppies, go in and hit Save, a: file name and exit then its saved by the "a" drive. There was no problem eh. Then I says you just pull, put your disc in go into file again say open go down to where it tells you the drives are you found your "c" drive you leave it there cause it will all naturally go to your "c" drive and

> highlight it and you go out go down to the menu till you find the file you want, highlight it, bang, you load it. I pasted it up on the computer and showed it to Sarah and Sarah was even liked it. She said it was a lot easier to understand. (Interview, 1/6/96)

In this passage, Thomas shows us that he comes directly to grips with the text. Rather than run away from it in frustration, as he had done in the past, he experiments with text and instructions and creates an alternate text with little reference to the actual text, in a more understandable form for himself and for his friend, who apparently cannot read or understand the manual. When the instructions that Thomas describes orally in the above paragraph are compared with the illustrated example from the manual in question, the two are remarkably similar.

The Bargainfinder and the computer manuals which he consulted were used frequently by Thomas. He would wake early on some Thursdays and drive to the local convenience store before seven o'clock. This was when the weekly Bargainfinder usually arrived at the store. Thomas said that it was important to phone private advertisers as quickly as possible. Even where advertisements indicated evening call only, Thomas phoned early on Thursday mornings. He said that he had lost several items by waiting. Both he and Susan would refer to the publication periodically during the week.

Stories. Thomas diligently attended the Reading and Spelling class which met Thursday mornings during September to December 1995. I organized instruction on the basis of a number of principles. One principle that guided these sessions was that better reading was a consequence of reading more. I knew most of the students in the small group (eleven students attended most sessions) and chose books that would appeal to their interests and prior knowledge. I began the sessions by laying out, on the large, square table around which the group gathered, a large pile of books that I had brought with me. Everyone was invited to browse through the selection. Then, I would begin the session by reading one of the stories to the whole group. Within a few sessions, one student challenged me to share the oral reading of stories with others in the group. Thus began the practice of everyone reading a portion of the story as the book moved around the table. Thomas took his turn at reading and engaged in the lively discussion about the book or the related topic that often took place before, during and after the reading.

During the two years that I worked with and observed Thomas, these reading classes were the only times that I observed him read stories. When spending time in the library on a tour of the facilities and when other students were raiding the stacks for narrative texts, Thomas did not do so. He said that when he had brought home library books in the past, they had been lost or pages had been ripped by his children. He feared paying the fines. He also avoided taking books to read to his children and said that he did not read to or with them. Although his oral reading capacity seemed to me to be more than adequate for this task, he harboured doubts about his ability and did not want to appear incompetent in front of his children. Like other students at the Centre, he alternately judged himself against a standard of excellence that he was never able to meet yet he felt that his reading was adequate to his needs.

Government Forms. Taylor (1996) has described the ways in which many public institutions that deal with poor, needy and powerless people document their own existence and define and proscribe the lives of their "clients". Thomas was involved in reading government forms that had to be completed or to which he was required to respond in order to comply with a request, avoid a consequence or complete a process which was either required of him or through which he had to go in order to achieve a desired goal.

Thomas appeared to fare reasonably well in his dealings with bureaucracy. The specific way in which Thomas dealt with bureaucratic forms was to seek the help of someone whom he felt could give him guidance. In the instances cited above, this was me. In the case of his income tax form, Thomas brought it to the Centre and asked if I would help him complete it to ensure that he had correctly followed instructions. This was a public process and at that time, many other students at the Centre were bringing their income tax forms for help. The other forms were more personal in nature. Thomas alerted me to them with a phone call, usually stating the urgency and danger that they posed and asking me to meet him at his home to help him. During these introductory conversations, the form was usually contextualized as a part of a larger problem in which he or his family were threatened by possible government action. Both Thomas and Susan were involved in these situations. Thomas dealt with me directly as I read the letters and forms and asked questions in order to understand my interpretation of the rationale for each question and how I felt it best to respond. Susan was usually in another room and Thomas moved between me and Susan when she indicated to him that she had a question to ask. Thomas either took notes or completed the forms with my guidance. He did not ask me to complete the form for him. I understood that he guarded this responsibility as his own. When a letter was a required or desired response, he would write one at a later time. He would present it to me and to Sarah at different times, for help with editing. Usually, the letters that were ultimately sent reflected strong editorial support from one of us. The final draft was typed and sent by Thomas.

Britton (1970) distinguishes the spectator and the participant role in reading and writing. By spectator, Britton means writing as a reflective activity. The participant role refers to writing as doing. This contrast is useful in understanding Thomas' reading behaviours. He said:

> The manual...parts of it. I was in too much of a hurry to really pay attention to the manual to see what was going on. I was interested to see if the thing was going to work or scrap it or what. (Interview, 6/25/96)

In his early writing, particularly his autobiography and stories about his family that were published in the Centre Newsletter, Thomas wrote in the spectator role. In contrast, his reading was concentrated in the participant mode. Thomas read to accomplish practical purposes and tasks for himself. This close link between reading material and task may partially explain how he could read with understanding material that would appear to have been beyond his ability level. The background knowledge associated with the task, and the motivation to accomplish it, may have aided Thomas to construct workable meaning from the texts.

The bulk of Thomas' reading was in the Bargainfinder and computer manuals. The uniqueness of the secondary discourses and the conventions associated with these genres make them quite difficult reading. Whether centred on computer components, dogs or automobile parts when he was a young "curbside" mechanic, he negotiated these texts guided by practical goals that were concrete and compelling for him. He managed the reading tasks with and without help from others.

Whether working alone, with Eugene or with me, installing software on his computer, Thomas employed a mix of reading and doing, listening and writing. These literacy and practical acts are bound together, as is Thomas' use of the Bargainfinder, by his orientation to do rather than to read or reflect. When he asked me to help him to complete government forms, he wanted help reading and understanding. When Eugene or I was working with Thomas on his computer, the reading was functional. We were helping him to "do" rather than to "read". He sums it up this way, "I learn through life, things I do everyday."

Thomas' View of Himself as a Reader

Thomas accepted that reading was important and thought of himself as a reader. On a number of different occasions he said, "The reading wasn't the problem. I could read it". "When I went to the Centre I could read pretty good.", and "The reading I never really had much of a problem with. The writing was the big one." Although he accepted some responsibility for a poor "attitude", he faulted his public school teachers for not giving him the help he needed to learn to read but did say that he had learned within a few years after dropping out of school in grade seven:

> I don't remember school too much...May be that had something to do with the fact that I didn't like school I skipped school allot I also had trouble with the teachers I had trouble learning math writing and reading... (Thomas, Autobiography)

He said, "I finished school at fourteen so I'd say right up to sixteen or seventeen before I could really feel comfortable about it [reading]" (Thomas, Autobiography, p.2). In referring to his work with computers he said, "Like myself with the manuals, reading it is not the problem..." (Interview, 1/6/96). He didn't see himself as a confident reader but he thought of himself as having some reading strategies. He said:

> If I'm doing something, if I'm writing don't know how a word is spelled a lot of times, I don't know if you noticed but I'll walk around and look at stuff. I look around and I'll go through the books and I'll look for something that's close to what I want. (Interview, 1/6/96)

He described another strategy as follows:

> I could read the newspaper, the Journal a lot of times I'd see a big word and I'd look at it and think because a big word I couldn't read so I wouldn't bother not really afraid of it if I couldn't sound it out properly I couldn't understand it I just didn't bother with it a lot of times I would skip the word it would tell you what the word meant anyway so I never had to go back and struggle with the word... When I went on usually it turned out that I could figure out what it meant. Looked big, looked complicated to pronounce... (Interview, 1/6/96)

He felt that he could read when he came to the Centre and didn't consider that an inability to read was the main reason that he enrolled there although he did feel that he could benefit from learning "bigger words." It was not the policy of the Centre to assess students' reading behaviours in a formal way. Any conclusions about Thomas' reading level were gathered from observation. Prior knowledge was important in Thomas' capacity to read print. He tended to read in topics and genres with which he had some familiarity. For example, from his earlier facility with automobile repair and repair manuals, it was a short and familiar step to reading computer manuals and instructions for other electronic equipment. He usually avoided narratives when choosing his own reading. He did not have a history or a habit of reading stories or novels and there was not of this kind of text in his home. Interest was similarly an important factor in the choice of reading material that he made and in his facility in reading it. Both prior knowledge and interest were bound together by the context he could create to give meaning to print, when he could combine reading and experimenting and "doing".

Interest and prior knowledge were important but not critical factors in describing Thomas' reading competence. His obligation as a Peer Tutor to work with other students who asked for help in reading provided an opportunity to observe him reading and working with print that was unfamiliar to him. For example, in this excerpt, Thomas is tutoring James who has chosen to read an introduction to psychology:

> James: If you had a dog (unclear) Dr. Pa val o
>
> Thomas: Pavlov
>
> James: Pavlov wants the dog (unclear) he saw that just before the dog got its food its mouth began to water. He thought about doing an experiment. Dr. Pav
>
> Pava Pavalovic
>
> Thomas: Pavlvo [Thomas' pronunciation]
>
> James: Pav Pavlov. Got to say it faster. Pavlov wanted to see if he could see if he could teach the dog to make its mouth water at the sound of a bell. Even too
>
> Thomas: even though. (Tutoring Session, 3/8/95)

As the tutoring session proceeds, Thomas similarly provides correct identification of other words, including "anyway"; "conditioning"; "stimuli"; "particular";" and watering". Thomas and James also have a brief discussion about the meaning of the concept of response to stimulus when James asks if watering is called a response. In this and other passages, Thomas demonstrates his capacity to decode words and that he possesses a reasonably large sight vocabulary, possibly at the Grade 10 level based on his immediate identification of the words listed above. The pattern of interaction and the minimal discussion around the ideas presented in the passage being read by James, even when James raises general questions, suggests that Thomas has fewer strategies for dealing with comprehension of new material, particularly in areas where he has little background knowledge.

Thomas' confidence in his own reading was mixed. He knew that he used specific strategies to decode and to a lesser degree to make meaning. These strategies helped him to achieve his purpose, but he was not satisfied that this was what reading was supposed to be. He felt that he could master reading with help from others. He said, "Well, I realized after a while that I could learn to read. With the help of a friend." (Interview, 1/25/94). He learned to read "on the street" with ease in order to be able to search for work. He wrote:

> I still had trouble with reading and Rod new that I had trouble so he started to teach me how to read he did it in away that I didn't feal bad about my self I was over fourteen and still had trouble withe my education he made a big differents.
>
> I was embarrest and didn't want people to know that I had trouble with reading it was hard to find work as well. (Thomas, Autobiography)

He elaborated on this with the following explanation:

> I started reading the paper looking for jobs, the Bargainfinder, the Autotrader. A lot of it was having to look for work. Like I say, I'd have my buddy there, Rod. He'd help me with a lot of the words. With him I'd do a lot of it then with myself I'd force myself to try and learn because it was too embarrassing to let anybody else know. (Interview, 1/25/94)

Two contradictory perspectives co-exist in Thomas' view of himself as a reader. He believes that reading is not a problem for him and that he has some strategies that work. Yet, he also mentions, in a number of different contexts, that he expects and needs help in learning to read and in reading. In reference to his teenage years, he gives his friend Rod much credit for teaching him to read. When speaking about his experience at the Centre, he often speaks of the support of Sarah in his reading and writing development.

Thomas' understanding of his own relationship with literacy was and is bounded by his sense of independence and the network of family and friends within which he lived and in which his literacy became only a part of his and other peoples' appreciation of him. He speaks with warmth about Rod's support for him. Yet, as Thomas' lack of confidence suggests, the other side of inter-dependence and independence is the self-realization that ironically, his liberty and his dependence exist within a delimited community and does not work well outside of it. Thomas was apprehensive about the world in which people would judge him solely or primarily by his capacity to read and write in that context. His view of himself as a reader takes both of these conditions into account.

Conclusion

Ziegahn (1992) has suggested that marginally literate adults who have experienced failure in learning to read and write in school when they were young, separate reading from the rest of their lives. My examination of Thomas' reading suggests, similarly, that Thomas' low opinion of his own reading competence keeps him from engaging in tasks such as reading with his children and dealing with official documents and forms. It is also the case that Thomas does not use reading to learn more about himself. He does not read for pleasure or as a means of reflection. However, Thomas' use of literacy for practical purposes contradicts Ziegahn's findings about the dichotomization of reading and daily experience. A main characteristic of Thomas' reading is the way he uses it as a tool to acquire and create objects and fulfill personal needs.

Thomas appears to understand his own reading from two contradictory perspectives: he has little confidence in his ability to read and relies on social networks to help him with material that he believes is important such as government forms, or he avoids reading altogether. Thus, he does not read with his children or voluntarily read novels in his daily life. In the past, he found ways around difficult reading tasks and the fear that impaired his performance (at work, reading customer addresses for bus shipments). Nonetheless, as with many other marginally literate adults, his estimation of his reading level was lower than his observed reading performance. He read a classified advertising publication and computer manuals as well as other texts that contain complex secondary discourses and are organized in ways that require considerable knowledge of text and print conventions. On a number of occasions, he acknowledged that he did not have difficulty reading.

Thomas' comments suggest that he did not consider reading as important as writing. In daily life, reading is a less tangible sign of literacy than writing. Seen from this perspective, it may be seen as less important by a marginally literate student. It is also more difficult for a person to think of himself as a reader than as a writer. To establish an identity as a writer, a person can examine his own writing and then make a decision about his role as a writer. Writing is both tangible and immediately verifiable. Adult learners may gauge their writing for themselves, for example, by its neatness and particularly by the number of words that they have spelled correctly. Self-evaluation of reading is much less clear-cut or stable. For example, Thomas claims that he did not learn how to read in school. He had to find a job. So, a friend taught him to read common environmental print. He considered himself a reader at that point, yet he also states that he could not cope with the straightforward reading requirements of his different jobs. Even now, when he is a more observably competent reader, he will not read with his children for fear of exposing his "poor" reading to them.

Thomas sees the purpose of reading as specific and goal-oriented. For Thomas, reading is a tool for the purpose of accomplishing concrete tasks that are valued by him. Reading is not valued in itself or as a means to other ends such as social mobility. His main and regular reading is the Bargainfinder. He reads this publication in order to buy things that he needs or wants. The Bargainfinder, Winfax and the Microsoft Word manual have value and existence only insofar as they contribute to his practical goals. He does not like forms and avoids them when possible. Being mostly out of range of his interest and any successful experience, he looks upon them as a threat, best dealt with communally. In meeting this threat, Thomas calls for help to those friends whom he judges are discrete enough and have the experience and institutional background with which to fashion a response to bureaucratic need embodied in the questions posed on the forms that he must complete and return.

Thomas' idea of reading seems to be associated with accomplishing something specific in the world, or linking up to the world through consumerism, i.e. buying a more powerful computer or computer parts to contribute to this goal. He doesn't look upon reading as something that one can or must like. This is clearly illustrated by the absence of print in all areas of the house except the basement computer room. The concentration of text in that locked room suggests that literacy is looked upon as a strictly functional, private and separate activity much like a home business and of a serious nature to be distinguished from family matters.

Writing

Overview

Thomas considered writing to be his main challenge and the focal point of his involvement with the Centre. On more than one occasion he expressed the following sentiment:

> I expected to learn how to write. The reading I never really had much of a problem with. The writing was the big one. (Interview, 30/5/96)

The questions: What does the idea of writing mean to Thomas, and How does Thomas see himself as a writer? form the basis of the analysis of data as it relates to these questions.

What Does Writing Mean to Thomas?

In order to explore the meanings that Thomas assigns to or constructs for writing, I have gathered Thomas' own thoughts, reflections and comments about writing as he made them to me during the past two years. I have grouped these constructs into categories to gain a sense of the structure of his preoccupation with writing. I have taken as my task, on the basis of the categories that emerged from the classification of his thoughts and ideas about writing, to develop a unifying theme which might reflect an idea of writing as understood from Thomas' perspective. The categories are labeled: a.) Before and Now; b.) The Value of Writing, and c.) Writing with a Computer.

Before and Now

Individual transformation and change in the direction of a return to family and community are often, and possibly necessarily, experienced and expressed through the interpretation of the self into a "before" and an "after" (Kerby, 1991). The changed individual may characterize the "before" as life lived in isolation. The "after" is often seen as a return to meaningful social integration (Donald, 1991). Thomas understood his relationship with society as being divided between the "before" and the "after" of becoming a writer.

Thomas often spoke about spelling. A main characteristic of "before" was his frustration at being unable to spell conventionally. He said, for example:

> I could read but I couldn't spell. The way I used to spell is I'd spell it the way it sounds. Some of the time it was right but the majority of the time it wasn't. English is the hardest language to learn. (Interview, 25/1/94)

He repeated this view on a number of occasions: "Words that I spell now I couldn't spell when I came" (Interview, 30/5/96). He described his inability to master spelling as a source of frustration:

> I know what I want to say in my head. To put it on paper... it's different. It don't bother me now as much now but before I knew what I was saying and what I am writing is two different things. To me it's supposed to be the same, and I mean it the same, but when someone else reads it, they're reading something different cause I haven't got half the spelling right... A lot of times if I was trying to write a story or something, I would try to write a story but a lot of times I would get frustrated, crumple it up, throw it away or hide it, never bother it again. (Interview, 25/1/94)

Another aspect of his view of himself as a non-writer was fear and anger:

> writing was really bad. I couldn't hardly spell... I was paranoid she'd [Susan] know I couldn't spell or if someone else came along and read it. (Interview, 1/6/96)

Thomas also felt that he lacked a mastery of usage and grammatical conventions:

> A lot of times I forget about the vowels or the silent letters. so, sometimes it seems like there's too much of it to grasp at once. Right now, if I write a story and something is spelled wrong, I can go to somebody here, in here or, at home, my wife. (Interview, 25/1/94)

Thomas had accepted the school version of what constitutes "writing". The school version centres on product rather than process. Correct presentation was valued above all else. This was expressed in attention to correct spelling, grammar and usage. Rather than learning that correct spelling and grammar were constructions that changed over time and were part of an editing stage in the writing process, Thomas had learned that a student either could or could not spell correctly. He saw his poor spelling as an almost insurmountable barrier. He expressed strong feelings of distress and frustration because his spelling was inadequate to save him from embarrassment. He created a clear dichotomization of his experience when he spoke with agitation about the gulf between what he was thinking and how he felt that it showed in his writing (Interview, 25/1/94). He emphasized that for him it was supposed to be the same, but it did not work as he wished it to.

A second dimension of Thomas' view of life before becoming a writer involved the difficulty of finding a job without this skill. He wrote:

> Trying to fill out resume or applications for a job was hard some of the jobs were good jobs but I could not get them because I couldn't, read or write very well when I went for a job I would get the application and then I would forget how to spell most of the information so i would hav to take it home with me and get my

> mother or my sister, to help me... If I had a job that had some writing involved I would find a way to get out of it. (Thomas R. Autobiography, p.2)

In this "before" story, Thomas tells how he was driven from the opportunity to even apply for a job by the panic, fear and embarrassment of not being able to write. In this comment, he indicates that he did have a support network in his immediate family. He also suggests that this network was not adequate to help him negotiate a regular job.

The shift in his idea of what constitutes legitimate writing is expressed in the following quote, recorded just after Thomas had begun to write more prolifically:

> ... when I started coming here I started learning spelling but there's still a lot of stuff that I spell the way it sounds, but I got it arranged now that I can, that I am aware of it and the stories that I write now you can read 'em even if there are a few words that are spelled wrong. (Interview, 25/1/94)

Thomas' construction of a "before" and an "after" to his writing history is also clear in this more recent comment:

> Words that I spell now I couldn't spell when I came... Before I started writing, if someone came up and asked me what I thought about it I'd shrug my shoulders and say it doesn't matter. (Interview, 30/5/96)

Thomas had carried the school standard of writing with him since before leaving school at age fourteen. It served as a measure of his belief that he had failed as a writer. This was the "before" of his view of the meaning of writing to him. The "after" was not success as a speller. It was acceptance of the view that communication with other people included ideas and opinions and the right to express them. Thomas no longer believed that he had to attend to conventional spelling. I will return to this subject when I introduce Thomas' views about the use of computers in his writing.

The Value of Writing

Thomas believed that writing was a valuable activity. He expressed this view of writing in relation to speaking out, family life, and success. When asked what he liked about the Writing Group, Thomas responded:

> Being able to write articles for the Newsletter. (Course Evaluation Interview Form, Oral response, 23/5/95)

Thomas writes for the Newsletter which publishes articles by students and by staff. The Newsletter is a forum in which students feel confident to speak publicly. It focuses on the life of the Centre and on issues that affect the Centre or may affect it in the future. In speaking in this medium, the Centre community defines its past, present and its members' lives. For example, in the 28 page December 1994 issue, there is an article by Sister B. on her departure for another city. There is another article written jointly by three students in honour of Sister B. A third article reports on the publication by the Centre of a handbook for tenants; a student wrote about a recent visit by a provincial Member of the Legislature; Sarah wrote about a conference on Teaching English as a Second Language; four students wrote about a recent adult literacy conference that they had attended; a picture accompanied an article reporting an award won by a student at the Centre; the Women's Group collectively wrote about the Centre Halloween Party; interviews with four students were printed and there was a letter-to-the-editor from Thomas.

Many students write for the Newsletter. Thomas has published at least one article in each issue of the Newsletter that has been printed since the Fall of 1992. Some issues of the Newsletter contained two of his articles. He has written a total of eleven pieces for this publication which is avidly read by students and staff alike. For individual students such as Thomas, this forum provides an opportunity for self-definition and for the exercise of a public voice which does not stand alone. When Thomas writes for the Newsletter, he is also demonstrating his connection to the community.

Thomas associates learning to write better with how he believes he should be in his family. He values writing as a means to have contact with family. He felt a need to be able to communicate with them in an acceptable form:

> Trying to write a letter to a friend or a relative back East or trying to write a note to my wife or seeing my niece writing something, how nice if I could do that, especially now that I got kids of my own. (Interview, 25/1/94)

It is "nice" for Thomas to contemplate a connection with his distant family. For example, he expresses stronger emotions about communicating with his immediate family. As noted earlier, when he went out for coffee early in the morning, he was unable to communicate with his wife, who was sleeping, because he could not write a note to her that would not embarrass him. Also, when he speaks about his children, he worries that they will blame him for their failures because he was a poor role model, a non-writer.

Thomas expressed great frustration at not being able to carry out his responsibilities within his family because of his perceived poor reading and writing skills. He spoke with evident frustration:

> Even bills of sale. If I sold a vehicle, I would tell, if I sold a vehicle I'd tell them to come up and I'd get my buddy or my mom - it was before I was married - I'd get my mom to write up the bill of sale and I'd just sign it. Now there's a lot of things I could write that before I couldn't. Years ago my own name, you couldn't even read it... .(Interview, 25/1/94)

He saw his reliance on his mother to help him prepare an invoice for a car which he sold as not living up to his role as the oldest surviving son. To reclaim his name, as he suggests in this retrospective comment, is to become a rightful member of one's own family. Reclamation can occur through writing.

Thomas recounted how he sat in the classroom as a child and knew that he, unlike his classmates, could not do the work that his teacher had assigned the class. In writing class at the Centre, he no longer had to reaffirm his failure. He felt that he had experienced success in writing. He said:

> The self-satisfaction is if I'm given an assignment or I have an opportunity to write something I know I can do it, and not have to sit there and say I can't do it. (Interview, 30/5/96)

Writing was among the sites at which struggle and failure were acted out. Thomas continued to try to learn to read and write both inside and outside of formal schooling. As a young man, he claimed to have been taught to read environmental print by his brother's friend. Before marriage, he twice enrolled in upgrading programmes at vocational colleges. He decided to withdraw from these programmes. The assignments that he receives in writing class and which he mostly completes as articles for the Centre Newsletter represent a reminder that he need no longer see himself as a failure.

Thomas' conception of the value of writing resided in three general areas. Firstly, he viewed it as a way of speaking his opinion to people who mattered to him. When he spoke about expressing his opinion, one way in which he did so was by talking about the writing that he did for the Centre Newsletter. Secondly, Thomas' sense of alienation from society was felt keenly in relation to his family. He spoke about the frustration, fear and anger associated with his feeling of not being able to engage in simple, daily and necessary writing. He felt alienated from his family when he could not convey messages to his wife or fulfill his role as eldest surviving son because he relied on his mother and his siblings to help him complete writing tasks. Thirdly, Thomas spoke about the value of writing in terms of success for himself. Whether he implicitly interpreted his early school experience as deciding not to learn (Delpit, 1992) or as failure on his part, he understood this experience as disappointing. Thomas wanted to complete successfully school writing tasks.

Writing with a Computer

At the Centre, writing took on a new complexion for Thomas. He said:

> I consider writing fun... I like if for the fact that it gives me the chance to express what I want to say. (Interview, 1/6/96)

The pleasure that Thomas felt in writing at that time may be associated with a number of events and experiences in which he was involved during this period. One of the ways in which Thomas saw himself as different from his pre-Centre self was in his relationship with technology. At the Centre, Thomas first encountered computers. This appears to have begun as an exploration of how they worked, similar to his interest and expertise in working with automobile engines. Because of his reputation at the Centre as a person who would help others and who was a competent handyman, Thomas was called upon to help set up new computers at the Centre and to correct problems with the computers when difficulties arose.

Computers are another part of the "before and after" interpretation of writing in his literacy life history. He said:

> Before I was dealing with the computer they had me writing on paper. Before I couldn't even write a note two or three lines long... Just to be able to sit there at the computer and write it... last year before I really got into writing on the computer I bought stacks of paper and I've been packing them back and forth in my binder for two years. I just do it all up on the computer. (Interview, 30/5/96)

He found writing on paper to be difficult. He felt that computers made a significant change in his approach to writing. When discussing his participation in the writing group, he stated:

> We'd start talking about something and they'd get us to write up an article on it. I used to love to wait for that one. At first I used to write one on paper but then I couldn't wait to get on to the computer to write it. As a matter of fact, I used to try and get a chair close to the computer so once I'd get the assignment all I had to do was spin around, put the computer on and go right to it. (Interview, 1/6/96)

The computer transformed the writing process for him into one which was faster, easier, more supported and less stressful. In the past, he was afraid of situations that demanded writing skills. Now, he relished the chance to write:

> With the computer, if you don't do it right it will tell you it's not right so then you're not wondering all the time. If you do it on paper or something, a lot of times if you don't do it right it won't tell you it's not done right and it won't show you where it's not right. For example, it will tell you if you've got too many characters in one line or like when you put a space between each word it will tell you if you've got too many characters in there. It just makes it so much easier. I've been able to use mine at home and go into the Centre and use one there and I've got the one rigged upstairs for email and stuff so if Susan's not home, instead of me taking the baby in the basement, I sit upstairs and do my email right from hers.(Interview, 30/5/96)

In this dialogue, Thomas speaks of the computer in the same way that he might speak about a good teacher who was there when he needed guidance and support.

When Thomas talks about computers, he seldom refers to them in relation to the substance of his writing. Generally, his comments deal with the presentation of what he wants to communicate. For example, he appreciates the spell checking feature of his word processing software because he believes that it allows him to communicate with other people on the internet without revealing that he cannot spell well. He believes that his computer allows him to communicate with others on an equal footing.

Discussion

Two years after he had begun to write in earnest, Thomas reflected:

> If you don't have a lot of money to buy the car that you want... if you can write good enough and get your message across good enough maybe that's all you need. If you get people to read it maybe that's better than having all the money to buy it. Cause when you're writing it you're putting your feelings into it, you're getting down to the nitty gritty type deal, what you want to say and what people want to hear. With money, you're just flashing it around. You're just buying it. With writing, people take you more serious. (Interview, 30/5/96)

In this comment, Thomas clearly expresses the values that he holds and which, for him, contextualize his writing. The depth of Thomas' feelings about the importance of writing as a transcending process is suggested by the weight which he assigns to it in comparison with money. He juxtaposes what he values as the higher purpose of "saying what people want to hear" against money, which he feels is less serious. Thomas is poor and financially dependent on the community for his own survival and that of his family. He is aware of and frustrated by his dependence. Nonetheless, he says that "getting your message across" is of greater value to him. What does "getting your message across" mean?

Gee (1989) suggests that one either has or does not have a Secondary Discourse. There is no partial mastery of a Secondary Discourse. For those not blessed with the "elaborated" primary code (Bernstein, 1971) and socio-economic status with which to master the secondary discourses that give access to prestige, money and power, Gee believes that there are no viable access routes to wealth and power. In this way, he sees literacy acting as a gatekeeper for the reproduction of social structures.

Gee introduces the term "mushfake literacy[1]" to describe a cobbled-together way in which people who do not possess a particular, certifying secondary discourse can "get by". He suggests that in the absence of the political change that must occur in order to transform the gatekeeping role of Secondary Discourses, teaching students how to "fake it" may be a viable response to the challenge posed by Secondary Discourses. Thomas' attention to the presentation aspects of writing with a computer and his explorations with computers suggests that he may understand and appears to use the "mushfake" potential of this tool. He described his use of computers in this way:

> What I liked about the computer most is when I'm writing on the computer I can change it without having to erase a lot of stuff and have a lot of "white-out". Before I had the computer, I had an electric typewriter and I'd be typing out stuff on the typewriter and then I'd go over it and that word's wrong and that word's wrong, but you couldn't erase it unless you used "white-out" and when you hold up the paper it's all covered in "white-out" like somebody had a Dalmatian, and then I'd get frustrated cause then I'd have to go retype it and I never ever got it to where there was no "white-out" and there's times I'd spend like 8 hours on one article. Then I got into the computer...
>
> Well the computer, now when I go in and type something up and I'm half way through a paragraph and I noticed in the middle there's something wrong, then all you gotta do is take the mouse, move the cursor up, cut it out and type in a new line. I do it right there on the screen. I love doing it that way. I don't even... a lot of the other stuff I used to sit there and brainstorm on paper first. I don't even bother doing it anymore. As soon as I get in, I turn the computer on; I start thinking about what to write. A lot of times I'll just sit there staring at the screen for a few minutes and then I will start typing something and if the first part sounds all right then I'll go on. If not, then I'll just black it right out and start over. A lot of times I can have the whole complete story done in half an hour, forty-five minutes. The last story I did up was about the changes and the moves the last three years at the Centre. A few times where I had a deadline on getting the stuff done,

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[1] Gee states that "mushfake" is a prison term meaning something that is created from available materials to approximate the appearance and function of something else that is not directly available. He uses the example of a knife which, in prison, may be made out of a piece of wood.

> it was pretty close before I got started on it. But once I got the computer turned on and started typing, there was no stopping me. A lot of times I'll go over it. I'll do spell check and then I'll read over it. One thing I have the tendency of doing is repeating myself. It's not necessarily repeating myself in the exact words. But I'll have a topic at the top and at the bottom I'll have the same topic and a different layout. A lot of times I'll go through it and check to make sure I don't do that. To me if it sounds too much like the beginning I'll cut it out and redo it.
>
> Me: Do you make many changes to the original?
>
> Thomas: Not really. I used to do it a lot at first but now it's not as much and like when I send it in to Sarah a lot of times she'll come and say she likes the idea and she likes the layout, just do some punctuation marks, check some of the spelling and then I'll go over it and then now that I have the computer I do the email which I've done with you a few times. Last assignment I was at the school and Sarah couldn't think of an assignment for me to do and she said I'll email you an assignment. (Interview, 1/6/96)

With a computer, Thomas believes that he can present his words and thoughts to the world on an equal footing with other people. In addition, he no longer faces the prospect of long, frustrating hours to prepare written material that he feels will not meet the school standards of spelling, usage and neatness that he believes are important. He no longer feels it necessary to redraft his work. He believes that the computer takes care of this in an instant. He has turned his attention from the form of text to the presentation of ideas. The computer takes care of the rest. The computer is Thomas' "mushfake."

How Does Thomas see Himself as a Writer?

Introduction

Thomas considers writing important because it allows him to be someone he feels he is not - someone with a voice that will be heard and listened to. Is this view of writing also evident in his view of himself as a writer? How has he realized his feelings about writing? Thomas began attending the Centre programme in the Fall of 1992. His first two articles appeared in the December 1992 issue of the Centre Writer. In 1993, two more articles were published in this in-house journal. In 1994 and 1995 five more of his articles were printed in the Centre Newsletter. He wrote an autobiography, letters of complaint and requests to City Hall and the Provincial Department of Family and Social Services, requests for information and material from companies, a letter-to-the editor of the Newsletter and numerous email messages.

In order to explore what being a writer meant to Thomas, I collected copies of much of the material that he wrote during the past two years. I have excluded from the data incidental notes and material that Thomas wrote in collaboration with other students and on which his name appears as one of many authors. The material which I analyzed consists of both edited and unedited samples. When quoted, I have indicated in parentheses whether the material from which the quote was taken was edited or unedited by other people.

Thomas' writing was analyzed and classified in terms of its "voice" and the topics about which he wrote. Britton (1970) defines "voice" as encompassing a writer's purpose, audience and function. Britton delineated three 'voices" - expressive, poetic and transactional - with a combined voice which he labeled as transitional. Graves' (1983) corresponding six "forms" include narrative, expressive, informative (expository), persuasive, descriptive, and poetic. Topic categories were established through a content analysis of the collection of Thomas' writing. The concepts of voice and of topic were considered representative of important aspects of Thomas' conceptualization of himself as a writer because they reflect central aspects of his writer's identity - why he considered it important to write, how he wrote, to whom he wrote and what he wrote about.

Voice

Thomas' writing voice or stance was usually informative or transactional. His wish to advise the world of his opinion and to inform other people about the nature of events remained strong. As he became a more experienced writer, Thomas' "voice' assumed more varied purposes, functions and audiences. He experimented with persuasive writing. His writing, like his reading, became more instrumental in the sense that he began to use it, not only to inform, but also to affect his world. Thomas continued to write for the Centre Newsletter and through this activity, he addressed a public audience. As his writing became more functional, "audience" also came to mean individuals. Individuals included public and corporate people who were unknown to him as well as people whom he knew and with whom he began to correspond by email.

When he began writing, Thomas' articles informed other students about how he renovated a van, ("Working on my Van", Centre Writer, vol. 1, no. 6,, 1992, p.3) or about what he and his family did when they went camping, ("Small Pleasures", Centre Writer, No. 7, April 1993, p. 6). In 1994, he wrote about developments at the Centre. These articles included a piece about the Peer Tutoring Group (Centre Newsletter, April, 1994, p. 8). He wrote about the meetings and justified what happened in group meetings in terms of the assistance that students receive and that helped them "grow". In another instance in June 1994, he wrote an article in which he reported about the Centre Annual General Meeting

(AGM). Thomas' article defined the salient characteristics of the AGM (a time when everyone who comes to the Centre gets to say how things will be run). He described the idea of financial statements and of the size of the Centre's quarters as well as the possibility of providing counseling for students. He also expressed his personal opinion about what he considered important in planning for the next year ("The Annual General Meeting", Centre Newsletter, June, 1994, p. 9). In June 1996, the Centre finally moved into a permanent home. In the space of one year, it had relocated twice and operated at three different sites. Thomas wrote "Time and Change" for the Centre Newsletter (June, 1996), informing people about the moves and interpreting the past few years in the history of the Centre. Each move in this history is seen as a potential problem that is overcome. In the following quote, Thomas has created an expository chronicle with an interpretive structure imposed upon it. He offers readers an interpretation of the history of the Centre and he presents his opinion of the most recent changes in the life of the Centre and of most of its students. Thomas describes the problem as one of successful adaptation:

> I can remember the first day I walked into the Centre. It was small, just a one-room class... with more students coming in, we needed a bigger room... It felt like I was back in a regular classroom and I was the centre of attention. With use it didn't take too long for the kindness and warm feelings from the little room to make their way to the big room... But like I was saying, good things don't last forever... It was hard and took some time...We moved into our new room in June. (Centre Newsletter, edited, June, 1996, p. 6)

Even in his private and most personal writing, Thomas wrote in an informative rather than an expressive or poetic way. During the Winter of 1995, Thomas had been requested by Sarah to keep a journal so that it could be referred to during weekly sessions when Peer Tutors were learning how to tutor other students. The entry for Sunday, February 26, 1995 is the sole item in the journal. The passage concentrates on recording what happened to him during his day. He began by writing:

> well it its a few days late but hears what I did first thing I did when I woke up is have a shower then I went and had my morning coffe...
>
> Whell we mad it now the trik is to fined the right parking spot so Im going to let Susan and her mom and the kids of first so I can scope the parking lot....
>
> Now is the time to relax for awile and watch some TV about an hower latter one of the guys that whants to by one of the pups stoped by to show his wife. (Thomas, Personal journal, 2/26/95)

The entry is 5-1/2 handwritten pages and gives a detailed account of his day, including shopping for groceries, attending to his dog breeding business, buying a freezer through the Bargainfinder, as well as a description of the difficulty of getting the freezer into his house. In these passages from his journal, Thomas illustrates his concentration on informative writing to the exclusion of other forms of writing.

As he became a more experienced writer, Thomas seems to have written in more varied and more sophisticated forms. Of the three pieces which he wrote in 1996, not including his email, one was an advertisement written in a persuasive voice. Thomas advertised as follows:

> Computer's - Donation's
> Looking for unwanted or uneeded computer's
> Monater's, cases, Keyboard, Printers
> XT. AT. 286, 386, 486,
> working or not working I will rebild and
> recondition you old computers for people who
> can't afford to buy new one's.
> I am not a computer company. I will build and
> restore these computers in my Home.
> Do you have old or unwanted computer laying
> arund collting dust if si why not donate them for
> recycling.
> I will picup your computer's at your convenience.
> (Thomas, advertising flyer, unedited, computer written, August, 1996)

At the Centre, Thomas and other students were encouraged to keep personal journals. Writing can be seen as a way to learn as well as a way to communicate. Thomas did not keep a regular journal and did not directly use writing to work though his thoughts. Nonetheless, he did use writing to deal with his ideas. His view of writing was an outward-looking one. Writing was for a public audience such as the Centre students and staff, for me, for officials such as social workers, or for the advertising and promotion departments of companies. He saw writing as a public activity and a tool for communicating with others. He did not distinguish his own learning from this communication function of writing.

In the Winter of 1994, Thomas decided to start his own business breeding dogs with the intention of selling them to individuals and to pet stores. He genuinely liked dogs. He wanted to learn more about them and to be a better informed breeder as well as to know enough about different breeds to raise and breed dogs that he could acquire free through the Bargainfinder. He used his newly found capacity and confidence in his own writing to help himself achieve these learning purposes. Thomas' acquisition of a poster of dog breeds of the world illustrates his approach. A large dog food company advertised on its products that it offered free posters illustrating dog breeds of the world. Thomas had read the ad and wrote a letter to the company asking for a poster. Within a few weeks, he received the poster. He hung it prominently in his basement computer room. Similarly, he used his confidence and writing skill to acquire a computer manual. He had inherited word processing software with the computer that he had received from his landlord. A manual did not accompany the software. Thomas went to the library, found the name of the software maker in a directory of American Software producers and wrote to them requesting a manual. Shortly afterwards, he received a manual from the company to which he had written. He used the manual to master the software that he had installed on his computer.

After Thomas began using a computer, his writing became more abstract. In addition to writing about his family and about events, Thomas began to use writing to express his opinions about issues and ideas. For example, in December 1994, he wrote a letter-to-the-editor of the Centre Newsletter in which he claims that children in a general sense are "more difficult" now than when he was young. He wrote:

> A good friend brought something to my attention about kids. You never really think about these things until somebody opens your eyes.
>
> Why are the kids so much different today than they were say ten years ago or twenty years ago?
>
> With all the violence in the schools. The sexual harassment. The prejudice and racism. And the physical abuse.
>
> You hear of some of the kids getting killed over their shoes or their jackets. What makes the clothes so important that it's worth somebody's life?
>
> It makes me wonder what it will be like for my kids. My son is in kindergarten and I am worried about the future of my son and next year my daughter will start school.
>
> Don't get me wrong - not all the schools are violent. But there are some problems that we have to look at.
>
> What do you think we can do about the future of our kids and the future of the schools?
>
> Please tell me your opinion or should I say tell us your opinion. (Centre Newsletter, partially edited, December, 1994, p. 25)

It is against this background that he expressed some concern about the treatment that his children would receive when they went to school. In this partially edited letter (spelling is edited but some grammar remains unchanged), Thomas demonstrated that he recognized that letters-to-the-editor are traditionally written in a persuasive form that requires the introduction of a level of generalization. His generalizations are accomplished by using the writing convention of asking leading questions. He incorporates an informal, personal and friendly voice that embraces the reader with details from his personal life to enhance the general and non-personal point that violence is a problem in schools. This piece of writing stands out for its level of abstraction. In earlier writing about his family, he wrote about the particular. Until his letter-to-the-editor about school violence, Thomas had written almost exclusively about his family in concrete and specific ways. For example, in "Pow wow", he began his article in this way:

> I like going to pow wows.
> I like to go and see some friends that are there and show my kids about their heritage and their mother's heritage. My wife has a niece that dances. She is ten years old. (Centre Writer, vol. 1, no. 6, edited, December 1992, p. 4)

The article continues in this vein and ends with the statement that he has gone to these dances since he met his wife. He tells stories to illustrate how close and loving the family is and how they participate in typical family activities ("CB Radio'; "Small Pleasures"). In his letter-to-the-editor, he wrote not about an activity but about the idea of "change" and "deviance", school and children. Again, in January 1995, he wrote an open letter about what he saw as bureaucratic discrimination aimed at people receiving Social Assistance. He wrote about discrimination by pointing out the inconsistency between two items. These were, firstly, an increase that the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) was charging in its fee for buying animals, and secondly, government regulations forbidding welfare recipients from owning pets. An excerpt from this letter reads:

> We hear about how they need money to look after all the dogs and cats that come in to the centre [SPCA] For food and medical. Now don't get me wrong its nice to have a place for stray dogs or cats but what I dont under stand is they whant you to come in and adopt a pet but they charg so much money....
> They say they want to get good homes for the animals does it mean that if your not working and on social services your home is not good enough. What makes a good home for a pet...
>
> WHATS MORE IMPORTANT WERE YOU GET YOUR MONEY OR WHETHER OR NOT THESE ANIMALS GET GOOD HOMES OR NOT ? (Thomas, "The S-P-C-A", unedited, computer written, January 16, 1995)

Rather than the predominant "I" and "we" of his articles about family, this letter uses the "us" and "them" that first sets up his argument. He effectively uses the contrast between the idea of increasing fees and the large number of stray pets being brought to the SPCA and the refusal of the Social Services Department to allow welfare recipients to acquire one of these pets. His use of the rhetorical question contrasting money and pet welfare highlights the argument. These letters reflect a level of abstraction and the use of persuasive writing conventions that is different from and more sophisticated than Thomas' earlier writing, including his articles in the Writer and in the Newsletter.

The persuasive voice was apparent more often when Thomas was using his writing in the real world for an instrumental purpose. In the period to 1996, there were three instances when Thomas wrote with a voice other than a transactional or informative one. In one case, his Newsletter article about a weekend with his family at a pow wow is quite expressive and, in Britton's (1970) typography, perhaps poetic. In the other two instances he wrote persuasively. For example, he wrote a letter to his social worker in reply to a notice of intent to terminate his family Support for Independence Allowance. He wrote:

> I am having therapy for my neck I keep getting pane in my neck and armes as well
> as bad headaces.
> My wife has lower back problems we bothe have nenatending therapy twice a
> week the therapest advised us not to do any heave lifting all the jobs I have
> expereans in invoves heave lifting as laber...
>
> We also have two kids of our owne our son is five he will be starting scool in
> september my doughter is only four years old and my wife looks after her...
> I have the opertonaty to go back to scool my self in september...(Thomas, letter to
> social worker, unedited, undated, Summer 1994)

In this letter, he marshaled "facts" about his health and about the health of his wife as well as evidence of his being enrolled in a school to "upgrade" his reading and writing and math.

My examination of Thomas' reading demonstrated that for him reading was primarily a tool to be used to negotiate his way through the world and for the purpose of accomplishing his personal goals. This may be seen in the following examples from his writing. In the Winter of 1994, as he was preparing to breed and sell dogs, he typed and printed a page on feeding requirements for pups of different breeds to give to people who bought his animals. This was to be given to the new owners of the dogs that he was going to sell. A part of this brochure indicates:

Age and no. Of Feedings per day	weight in lbs.	weight In kg.	coloric requirements kcal. M. E/Day
PUPPIES WEANING	1-3	.5-1.4	124-334
	3-6	1.4-2.7	334-574
TO 3 MONTHS	6-12	2.7-5.4	574-943

(Thomas, Dog feeding instructions, unedited, Winter, 1995)

He used his writing in a similar way in the development of his computer when he requested and received a manual from a software company. He also used his writing instrumentally in the summer of 1996 when he prepared an advertisement soliciting obsolete computers for recycling through his efforts to provide cheap computers to people who would benefit from them but who could not afford new ones. Thomas' use of writing to respond to denial of a child care subsidy and to a threat to cut him from the welfare rolls are further examples of this category of the functional use of writing. Until this point, Thomas' response to bureaucratic and official mail was most often silence. His relationship with bureaucracy suggested that he understood that writing is the form of communication most closely and effectively associated with government. His previous reliance on my help when he had to respond to government demands was based on my capacity to counsel him on how he might effectively respond to the bureaucracy in writing. Now, he appears to see his own writing as adequate to the task.

Topics

> We choose the things we write about for various reasons - some because they irritate us into thought, others because they confirm us in what we have been thinking already. Some subjects are close to us and we want to underscore that proximity; others are distant and we wish to draw them in closer, or else to study the terms of their distance.
>
> Sven Birkerts
> The Gutenberg Elegies.(1994), p. 167.

a.) *Family:*

Recent research (Hayden & Wahl, in press) describes how beginning adult writers use writing as a means to strengthen the bond with their children and family. The first stories that were written by the women in that study were birth stories that they could then pass on to their children. These stories were about their families and were written to reaffirm the importance of family. An important, early and persistent topic of Thomas' writing was family. By family I mean not only that his family was a topic of his writing but also that he chose related topics and wrote about himself in such a way as to present himself as a mainstream man with a mainstream family. The Centre Newsletter and the Writer were school publications that provided Thomas with the opportunity to write about his family in the school-appropriate way. Family does not represent writing used as a tool to accomplish other tasks as much as it approximates a "school-like" subject of writing, done in a school-like context. Most of Thomas' essays and other written production on the subject of family were written for and published in the Centre Writer or Newsletter. This forum offered the support that he needed to achieve the school-like end product that he said he expected of his written material. His spelling, grammar and usage were proofread and edited by the literacy worker who prepared the publication. His essays appeared in printed form in the Newsletter. They were neat, the spelling was correct and the presentation was flawless. "Family" continued as a topic of his writing throughout the period studied. As he became a more accomplished writer, two other topics surfaced - dogs and computers.

In his Newsletter articles, he describes and discusses his own family, except in one instance where he writes about family in an abstract sense. For example, in 1992, he wrote two articles that were printed in the Centre Newsletter. The first was entitled "Working on My Van" and falls under the broad definition stated above. He wrote:

> In my spare time I like to work on my van
> When I first bought my van it did not run and all the tires were flat...
> My friend and I got the van running the next day, but to fix it up the way I wanted it to look took another four months...
> After I finished the inside of the van I got a tent from my friend which snaps on the outside of the van. When we are at the campsite it gives us more room for the cooler, the lawn chairs and the suitcases.
> I am pleased with the van. Now we can go camping. (Centre Writer, edited, vol. 1, no. 6, p.3)

In this article, he describes the stages of repairing the vehicle and relates this effort to its value as a means of taking his family camping. In the second article entitled "Pow wow", he tells how he enjoys going to powwows with his family and about watching his children participating in the dancing. In 1994, both of his articles are also about his family. For example, "Small Pleasures" is a family idyll about time spent together with his wife, daughter and especially his son, fishing and going to a pow wow. He wrote:

> Fishing is something I enjoy doing. I can take my whole family with me fishing and camping. ("Small Pleasures" Centre Newsletter, edited, June 1994)

He presents his family as happy and engaged in those activities that he thinks mainstream families would do, such as fishing, camping and attending a barbecue:

> We went to a place last summer called Alexis. They had a pow wow there. While my wife watched the pow wow with my daughter, I took my son fishing with me.
>
> We went down the road a short distance where we could go fishing. There are only jackfish there but we like it anyway. There is a bridge you can fish from or you can fish on the bank. There is grass to sit on.

> My son loves to fish. He has his own fishing rod... (Centre Newsletter, edited, May 1994)

The article from which this excerpt is drawn is eight paragraphs long. His wife and daughter are present in the story but remain in the background. Most of the eight paragraphs are devoted to fishing with his son. The topic of family was the subject of another article in the June 1996 Centre Newsletter. In this article, he announced the happy arrival of his third child, a baby that he and Susan informally adopted from Susan's niece:

> My wife Susan and I were blessed with a baby boy...
> Believe me, I was nervous when my first child, Brian was born, but fear turned to joy. Then we were blessed once more with the birth of our daughter Lynn and I was just as nervous as with my son...
> They say the third time is a charm but I think it is the fourth time. I hope I will still feel just as nervous - I'm sure I will. (Centre Newsletter, edited, June 1996, p. 29)

Approximately one quarter of his email dealt with his family. His children are objects of his concern, particularly with regard to their education. These family writing samples also include references to his children's school situation, and his concern about his family's health. He sent email messages such as the following:

> Brian is realy happy that you and your firends are going to his school. He realy injoys the work that he douse we dont have to fite with him eany more to go to school. (email, unedited, Fri. 29 Mar 1996 15:52:19)

On June 28, 1995 he emailed:

> Brian's awords start at 10:30 so if I can ill be at the senter. (email, unedited, 28 Jun 1995 08:58:22)

An email conversation went on for several days after the awards ceremony which Thomas and Susan attended, expecting that Brian would be receiving an award. Thomas was upset when this event did not occur. He wrote:

> I under stand that there is a lot of studens that diserv awords and not all the studen can get one but the paper that they sent home with Brian had his name with a fuwe other kids for a aprovel
>
> but when we got there they didnt say enthing about him... (email, unedited, Wed 28 Jun 1995 22:54:25)

On another occasion he used email to talk about his children in light of the impending adoption of Susan's niece's baby:

> my other kids seam to be growing so fast I miss being abell to hold them in my arms and rok them to slep mid you when I did it with Brian and Lynn I was the one hoo fell a slep. (email, unedited, Thu, 8 Feb 1996 17:54:51)

Thomas enjoyed writing about his family, particularly his children and the topic occupied much of his writing. Writing about his family allows him to be perceived as a normal, loving and caring father carrying out his responsibility toward his family and in control of this aspect of his life.

b.) *Dogs:*

Another significant topic in Thomas' writing was dog breeding. He wrote about dogs eleven times. The writing of these pieces paralleled and supported his decision to set up a dog breeding business. However, he did not choose to use the material about dogs for the Newsletter. This topic was included in private communication with me in his journal and his autobiography, in his email messages, in letters which he wrote soliciting promotional materials from companies or in advertising material which he prepared for the purpose of selling his pups. Many of his messages about dogs chronicled his optimism about breeding them and his acquisitions of new dogs or the sale of pups. In this autobiography, he mused on his then recently-made decision to try breeding dogs:

> Once you believe in your self you can do just about any thing if you want to. One thing I would love to do more than anything in the world is rasing purebread dogs and traning them...(Thomas, Autobiography, unedited, September 1994)

At another point in his autobiography he wrote:

> Well, I got my poodle that I wanted he is three years old and hes a black purebread toy poodle. His name is lord Guston.
>
> He is well behaved when you tell him to sit he, will sit up on his hind legs. (Thomas, Autobiography, unedited, September, 1994)

In February 1995, he again referred to his dog breeding in an informative way, in the one journal entry that he made at my request:

> one of the guys that whants to by one of the pups stoped by to show his wife. They piked the small black one. They are growing fast. And there getting the wavey fure that there parents have they look alot like there mother. (Thomas, Journal, unedited, February 26, 1995)

In his email, he mentions dogs on seven occasions, mostly in June and July 1995, when his dogs were birthing. On June 22, 1995 Thomas and I had an email interchange in which he wrote:

> ...the dog I got thissmorning was in the bargen finder the lade was moving and could not ceep her she seam to be pritty good withthe klids she stand about the same hite as the poodle. (email, Thu, 22 June 1995 17:40:39, unedited)

> ...Hy Hirbe I got your mesage this smorning it is about 12:45 I was at the docters and I had to go to lunden dary to picup another dog. The dog that I got is a scottish terrier cross with poodle. (email, Thu 22 Jun 1995 12:48:12, unedited)

On July 4, 1995, he sent the following message:

> Whell I started biuildi[illegible]e dog kenalls that is on till it started to rain... (email, unedited, July 4 1995 21:17:35)

His last reference to them was in mid-September 1995. By the early spring of 1996, he was no longer in the dog breeding business. He had sold or given away all the dogs and the pups and had begun to dismantle the kennels that he had built for them in his backyard.

c.) *Computers:*

Thomas used computers to write. He also wrote about computers. Computers were an important aspect of Thomas' attempt to gain control of his life. This was expressed directly in his use of computers and in a more limited and practical way in his writing about them. Thomas only wrote about computers in his email messages to me. He was in the process of trying to upgrade the computer that he had received from his landlord. With little money and a rudimentary knowledge of this technology, he encountered problems. His email was both a reflection of these challenges and, like his use of the telephone, one way in which he summoned my help. Before he had email capacity, he would phone to ask for help. Email became another medium through which to call upon members of his support network. This is reflected in the following excerpt from one of his messages:

> I would still like to get to gether and lern more about windows. (email, unedited, Thu Feb 8, 1996 17:54:51)

Like telephone conversations, Thomas' email possessed an informal, personal and ongoing character. For example, describing a problem he had been having with his computer he wrote:

> my computer has been doun it still isent the way I whant it but at lest I can use it. (email, unedited, Sun., Sept. 10 1995, 16:19:54)

Three days later, he announced:

> It s nice to have the computer working agen...(email, unedited, Wed., Sept 13, 1995 14:24:22)

Thomas worked at upgrading his computer, particularly by increasing the capacity of his hard drive. He wanted to install software that would allow him to communicate with the internet. He also wanted to install more software, including the Windows interface for the DOS operating system so that he could operate a wide variety of applications, including an accounting programme. Among the messages in which he mentioned this is the following:

> sorry I took so long to call back I was working on the ccomputers all weakend that is my friend and I. We put a three and a hafe drive in my brouther in lawes computer and we reabilt and restored the hard drive on another computer that I pick up from the bargen finder as well...(email, unedited, Sun., Jul 2, 1995, 12:18:33)

These messages illustrate the main thrust of Thomas' writing on the topic of computers. He wrote about technical matters, about his desire to buy software and about his progress in installing it. His writing about computers was practical. It was devoted, as were his actions, to improving his capacity to use the computer to communicate his opinions to the world and as a tool for developing his independence in the world.

When he had become comfortable with his production of school-like writing, Thomas' choice of topics expanded. Some Newsletter articles that he wrote addressed issues related to the Centre itself. These articles included a description and discussion of the Annual General Meeting, a report on Centre students' meetings with their university pen pals, and his article interpreting the recent history of the Centre. These articles are well structured and present a coherent perspective on the issues being discussed in them. Again, the spelling and grammar are correct. From within these structures, Thomas assumes the responsibility of informer and conveyor of information and opinion. Thomas saw himself as a writer in the schooled sense of the term, in which writing is done as an end in itself.

Writing, Computers and Control

Computers are linked to Thomas' strongly felt need and desire for independence. He expresses this in the language of control:

> Thomas: The computer, you turn it on, I can control what I watch on it, what I do with it. If there's a programme there I don't want, then I take it out. I put it in the background so I don't use it. My kids can't use it. A lot of the programmes you get you can have it so that the password protection ... if nobody knows the password they can't get access to it.
>
> Me: You talk about control. Is that important to you?
>
> Thomas: It is now before it never was. In the past I didn't really care either.

> Me: Why do you care now? What can you do about it?
>
> Thomas: That's what I'm saying. I'd like to get into learning more about the computer and doing the web pages and hopefully get enough people interested that I can do the web pages for them and keep them updated and have them pay me enough, so much a month to do it.
>
> Me: Control over things?
>
> Thomas: If I'm doing up the web pages, so much per month to set it up and so much to maintain it. And that way it's my business and if some guy comes along with an attitude problem, well if you don't like the way I'm doing it or you don't want me to do it, take it somewhere else, right. I have control. You don't tell me how it's going to be done. You do up the information. I put it in and then that's it. Just to be able to more or less be self-employed. Web pages, they're good money for a guy who has the money to build up some really nice systems and sell really nice systems at a really nice price. I know a guy does up 486 systems, really nice systems, and sells them for $1500.00. If a guy could sell one or two of them a month, a lot of money maybe sell one a month, $1500.00. That's a lot more than most people make working anyway. (Interview, May 30, 1996 L.261 to 282)

As in the case of other low income individuals and families (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Elish-Piper, 1997), Thomas uses literacy in general and writing in particular as a tool with which to do the business of everyday life. As the above quote illustrates, Thomas harnessed writing for a more extensive purpose as well. He understood independence as not taking orders from a boss. He wanted to be his own boss, to control his own life. He saw writing as a tool with which to learn about and use computers, and computers themselves as a means to independence.

Many students, Thomas among them, remember school literacy as a focus on skills and consisting of discrete elements such as spelling and grammar (Elish-Pipe, 1997). Often, adults who have experienced early failure learning to read and write in school dichotomize literacy and experience (Ziegahn, 1992). When they do address writing, it is often as a resource with which to accomplish the "business of life", not as an end in itself. Thomas' view of himself as a writer spans the spectrum from school-like writer to user of writing as a tool. When he enrolled in the Centre programme, it was primarily to learn to write. His early experience of writing had been in the school setting and he had expressed frustration at not being able to spell correctly and present his writing in the neat and clean form expected and taught in schools. He wanted to produce written material that embodied these school-like characteristics.

Thomas' conception of himself as a writer also found its origins and meaning in the general goals that he set for himself. Thomas wanted to breed and sell dogs. Later, he decided that he could support himself as an independent business person by recycling obsolete computers. Dogs and computers became significant subjects in his use of writing. He wrote letters to dog food manufacturers and to software producers as well as to social workers who were handling his welfare file and to city officials who were responsible for public health. He produced ads for the purpose of selling dogs and brochures with which to solicit obsolete computers. He wrote autobiographical notes and essays in which he talked about dogs. He wrote many email messages in which he discussed dogs and computers. This writing was directly related to projects in which Thomas was involved for the purpose of establishing his own financial independence. In these cases, the topics about which Thomas wrote were a reflection of practical goals which he was attempting to accomplish. Writing was a tool or a resource, not an end in itself. By definition, the context of this writing did not allow for attention to spelling and grammar. Nor did Thomas appear to attend to these aspects of print in such contexts. This writing was undertaken not to inform or to achieve excellence in writing but to solicit advice or to persuade.

The findings of this study that highlight Thomas' desire to learn to write confirm the research of Ziegahn (1992), Horsman (1990) and others that points to the importance that individuals assign to writing as a mark of literacy. Writing was the nub of illiteracy for Thomas, the place where fear and embarrassment and a sense of inferiority and failure intersected with print. His idea of himself as a writer and a participant in society became intimately bound up with his computer. He saw this technological tool as an equalizer that allowed him to communicate on an equal footing with everyone else in the world. During our drive to another city to attend the annual AAAL (Provincial Association for Adult Literacy) conference, to present our seminar "Men's Groups in Adult Literacy Learning", we were discussing his computer and his computer room in the basement of his house. He noted:

> Sitting down there in front of my computer, I feel like I have the whole world at my fingertips. (Personal communication, November 1995)

This view is a far cry from his earlier descriptions of himself as powerless.

Conclusion

The results of my exploration of Thomas' view of writing support the findings of research on the role and value of computers in learning to write among adult basic education students (Freer & Alexander, 1996; Askov, 1991; Padak & Padak, 1988; Young & Irwin, 1988). Computers have become an integral part of Thomas' writing experience and his understanding of what writing is and how it is best done. Research has suggested that word processing software may provide adult learners with the opportunity to make corrections more easily including editing for grammar and spelling (Glover, et al., 1990; Honisher & Selfe, 1991). The issue of spelling and of the presentation of appropriate, school-like written material was seen by Thomas as a challenge. He found that the computer was an important help in overcoming these hurdles.

Researchers (e.g. Fine, 1991) have speculated that the computer installation in an adult basic education programme may resemble a work environment rather than a classroom. Fine further suggests that students who feel embarrassed at telling friends that they are attending a writing class may feel more comfortable if they understand their learning to be in the context of a computer course. This observation is echoed in Thomas' handling of his computer. When he first received it, the computer had a place of honour in the living room alcove. Within months, and paralleling Thomas' deepening involvement in computer writing, he went to great efforts to prepare a basement room for his computer. The room came to resemble an office. Desks were complemented by cork noticeboards. Thomas went to an office supply store and bought paper clips, pencil holders and a stapler. A lock maintained Thomas' exclusive access to the room. Thomas had created a non-school, real world environment in which to animate and give meaning to learning to write. Possibly, the exclusion of his family was a way of creating a separate "work" world for himself, in line with his view of what constituted mainstream families. It may be that the acquisition of a secondary discourse, as he saw it, began with the form - the identity kit - before or in conjunction with the content.

Fine (1991) characterizes students' views of computers narrowly. There may have been students at the Centre who found the computer terminal corner of the room to be more work-like than other areas of the programme. There were a number of students who did work diligently at the keyboarding computer programme. Thomas' experience and perspective suggest a broader definition of computer students' understanding of the meaning of computers in adult education. I believe that part of Thomas' attraction to computers at the Centre was that they represented an understandable and integrated slice of the "real world". For adults such as Thomas, who have worked and who have responsibilities in the world, even literacy instruction that is delivered in a holistic way can appear isolated from daily life when contextualized by a school setting. Computers are useful and multi-purpose. They are advertised continually in the media. They may represent not only the world of work but also mainstream values.

Thomas' marginalization in the world was not caused by literacy. Thomas' restricted literacy accompanied his movement toward the fringes of his community. It is in the arena of reading and writing that he chose to try to respond to his marginalization, to empower himself, to gain some sense of control over his life and future. Thomas' engagement with computers is one aspect of his attempt to empower himself. Computers are the real world as well as a powerful tool for accomplishing purposes that might otherwise remain unfulfilled. The computer gave Thomas the confidence to write to his social worker in an attempt to reverse a decision that previously he would have accepted for want of a way of responding. Upon deciding to launch a dog breeding business, Thomas wrote to acquire a poster and to get a manual for his word processing software so that he could better learn to exploit the computer. The approximation of a meaningful work environment, and particularly one in which he retained control, was a part of this process of empowerment.

Computers have come to be understood by Thomas as constituting a substitute social network. This is most clearly evident in statements such as the following one. When asked what words first came to mind when he thought of computers, he answered:

> Friends. It does everything that I want the majority of the time. it gives me access to all different places. (Interview, May 30, 1996)

As a network, the computer has a number of advantages over a social network consisting of people, either at the Centre or outside of it. The uncertain availability of the appropriate person, or, access to people to help respond to a literacy need is replaced by the technical question of whether or not the computer is equipped to do the job. Most important, computers do not require the same cultivation as do people, thus reducing the need to maintain reciprocity and symmetry.

The acts of teaching and of learning to write often confront the frustrations of what Gee (1989) has called "the identity kit" that is secondary discourse. If the secondary discourses associated with power and wealth in society encompass not only language but ways of acting, dressing, speaking and being, etc., how can we effectively teach forms of writing that represent powerful discourses? Gee suggested that in the absence of political change, marginally literate learners could try to cobble together an ersatz or "make-do" version of the desired secondary discourse with which to fool or cheat the gatekeepers. Delpit (1992) has addressed the questions raised by Gee by emphasizing the transforming impact that committed teachers can have on poor and culturally different students. Delpit's belief in the teacher as co-agent of transformation echoes Giroux's (1985b) exploration of the ways in which teachers can become transformative intellectuals. This perspective also finds support in Freire's (1970a) view of the role of the teacher as co-constructor of the world and in Fingeret's (1983) call to adult education instructors to work with and not for their students in constructing meaning in the world.

The findings of this study with regard to the use of computers in writing suggests that this technology has some potential as a mushfake tool. Thomas believed that the computer allowed him to avoid the frustration of poor spelling and splotches of white-out. As a result, he wrote more and with greater confidence. He felt and stated that by using the computer he was on an equal footing with anyone. He believed that respondents to his email or to his internet queries would not know that he was a literacy learner. The absence of fear of embarrassment and humiliation allowed Thomas to experiment with language, to use it successfully to get those items that he wanted to have and to speak his opinions and be heard in public. The ease with which computers can be used to process documents and the leveling of individual relationships that seem to be inherent in the use of computer technology suggest that Gee's idea of fooling the class differentiating functions of language and Delpit's similar approach to "getting a piece of the pie" can be accommodated within the possibilities of computers in adult literacy learning.

Thomas was aware that the kind of change in himself for which he was looking and which he felt he had found in his writing (with his computer) was but one form of change and that he had and would continue to pay a price for trying to accomplish this kind of change. He stated:

> This month I'll be thirty-five years old. This month I've got three kids now, one on the way so I'm tired of having my life not going anywhere, and except for the learning and the computer it still hasn't gone anywhere. I'm still in the same boat as my situation. As far as my lifestyle goes. I'm not having money to cover utilities or if the kids need something not having the money to get it for them... even for my computer, if I need something, the way I look at it, I should be able to go out and get it. I shouldn't have to worry about the money to get it. Like for upgrading memory. Memory right now has dropped down to like twenty, twenty-five bucks a meg. I've got to wait a good month or more just to get enough money to go out and buy a meg or two. I'm looking for a coloured monitor. I've been trying since December to get a coloured monitor. Coloured monitors are going for about a hundred bucks or so. December and its now June and I'm still not close to

> getting a monitor. Those things really bug me. My kids say I'd like to get a new bike or new shoes and it bugs me that I can't afford it right now and I got to wait until we get some more money and that money's not coming. By the time you pay the rent and pay the utilities the money's shot. (Interview, 6/1/96)

When I recently tried to phone him, his phone line was out of service. He had not paid the bill and the phone company cut off service. What good is a modem when you cannot hook up to the internet or email and you cannot use your new power to write, to communicate with the world that you have recently joined? The reality of life catches up.

Thomas and His Son

Overview

In this section, I examine the literacy experience of Thomas' son within the framework of the concepts of family and intergenerational literacy. I discuss Thomas' views about his children's literacy acquisition and his own role in this process. I analyze data drawn from Thomas' son's experience learning to read in school and Brian's literacy learning at home. I connect the meaning of the analysis to current concepts and models of intergenerational literacy.

Thomas' view of his son's literacy needs

In discussing his children and his son, Brian, in particular, Thomas repeated a similar theme on a number of occasions. He said:

> Like my son. He's four. He cries now to go to school. Next year he'll go to school. I'm praying that he goes right on through and just keeps right on going. I don't want to see him go through the stuff I went through. These part-time jobs, having to cover up on the reading and the writing. I want him to go into the workforce with both feet and go straight on in, nothing to hold him back. Same for my daughter. They'll grow up to be doctors, lawyers or something. All the power to them. (Interview, 1/25/94)

Later, he wrote:

> My son is five and my daughter is four I started to wonder how would I explain to them that they have to go to school and stay in school if I don't have my education how can I tell them to stay in school my kids meen alot to me I don't want them to go through the same thing I did. (Thomas R., Autobiography, 1994)

In Spring 1996, responding to a question about where he saw himself in five years, he referred to his children and computers, saying, "I'd like to see the kids use computers a lot more. I'd like to see them doing really well in school" (Interview, 5/30/96). Later, during the same conversation, referring to Brian, he said, "I just sat him down and said, 'You know, well, you have to go to school. You have to learn.' ".

Thomas is not a blind or naive optimist. He is down to earth in his assessment of his situation. As quoted on page 146 above, he said that he was aware that little had objectively changed for him and that there was little likelihood that his literacy gains would result in a transformation of his life. Nonetheless, and in spite of his own early school experience, Thomas' statements clearly suggest that he expects his children's schooling will help break the chain of failure and disappointment that he knows is strong.

In September 1994, Brian first went to kindergarten. In January 1996, Brian was mid-way through Grade One. While visiting Thomas one weekday afternoon in Winter 1996, I noticed that Brian was home. I asked after his health and Thomas responded that his son was not sick. He said that Brian was crying not to go to school. He was having trouble with his reading and with arithmetic. He was unhappy because he felt that the teacher was mean to him. I offered to help. I contacted his school and arranged to observe Brian during what I was told by his teacher was a typical morning at school.

Brian's Literacy

Literacy Learning in School

Brian walked the four blocks from home to school with his father. Brian and his sister Lynn, age 5, both attend this school. Lynn is in kindergarten in the afternoons. The children are taken to school each day by either their mother or their father. On the day I came to observe Brian, other children were in the schoolyard playing before the morning bell rang. It was a cold morning and Brian wore a light jacket. The teacher on supervision allowed him to go into the school. He was waiting on a bench in the hallway in front of his classroom when the bell rang.

The school is a well maintained community school built in 1952. The classroom is bright. There are large windows covering most of the East wall of the classroom, looking out onto the school playground. The room is clean and neat. Children sit at individual, small desks, arranged in four rows, two each, facing each other across an aisle. A blackboard covers the wall to the side of these desks. Brian's desk is located in the first row at the corner closer to the blackboard. The other half of the room is occupied by tables, an open coat rack, a teacher desk, and an easel. Across from the tables is a carpeted reading nook lined with books and separated from the desks by low shelving. The room is decorated with student-made art and other curriculum related projects as well as with teacher-made notes on current language learning activities.

There are seventeen students in the class, a balanced mix of girls and boys. Aside from Brian, there is one girl who is possibly native. The other children appear to be from mainstream homes. Their teacher is a female, in her mid-thirties who has been teaching for about 10 years. During private conversations with her and in a meeting with her and the school principal, she expressed exasperation with Brian for his frequent absences and for what she referred to as his avoidance behaviour. For example, she stated that when Brian senses that he may be called upon to respond to a teacher question in front of the class, he will ask to be excused to go to the bathroom. The teacher also said that she finds it difficult to deal with Brian's passivity. Ms. Smith claimed that she gives Brian extra attention.

The bell rings at 8:30 a.m. At 8:47 a.m., before the children settle down to the lessons of the day, a male parent volunteer comes into the classroom to work with Brian. They work together, one-on-one, each Wednesday morning. Sessions are for 30 to 45 minutes and are conducted in the kindergarten room down the hall from Brian's classroom. The kindergarten is empty during the mornings.

The tutoring begins with a review of sound-symbol relationships, particularly the ones with which Brian had some difficulty during the previous session. These include "d"; "g"; "j"; "n"; "h" and "v". The volunteer presents each letter on a flashcard and Brian says the letter and the sound if he recognizes it. They sit facing each other across a small desk. Brian is sitting with his arms crossed on the desk. His head is cradled in them. He says that he is tired. When a letter which he doesn't recognize is presented, his eyes wander. When the volunteer puts aside the flashcards, Brian becomes animated and tells a story about a "psycho dog" at home. His father is raising and breeding dogs. Currently there are six dogs in his home and one litter of pups. There are also two cats. One of the dogs is nippy and fights with the other dogs. Brian likes animals and during the course of this session tells many stories about animals. There is no response to these stories from the volunteer. The volunteer tutor operates from a perspective in which reading and writing are seen as autonomous, discrete and universally accessible skills. He appears not to notice Brian's experience as a legitimate response to and way of dealing with the print and the situation which he is in.

The activities that the volunteer tutor has prepared include a phonics board game, the flashcards, phonics workbook and the reading of a book. These activities may be appropriate, or at least not harmful practice for a middle class child who has been exposed to the assumptions about understanding these particular kinds of instructions and games and their serious purpose of breaking the alphabet code. The activities are discrete, decontextualized, culturally arbitrary (although presented as universal) as to purpose, structure, procedures and rules. The way in which the tutor conducts the activities and the manner in which he interacts with Brian about them is also buttressed with cultural assumptions. For example, the tutor asks Brian to put away the game while doing it himself. This is a culturally specific form of child-adult interaction with which Brian is unfamiliar. When he fails at a transaction or to respond to directions in his family world, he is reprimanded directly, verbally or physically. Here, the volunteer tutor reacts differently; he says one thing while his attendant action is discontinuous with his words. While these adult reactions may attempt to accomplish the same purpose, they do so in very different ways. There is no indication that Brian has understood the tutor's message.

The tutor has crafted a game to play with Brian to give him practice learning sound- symbol relationships. The game consists of a board divided into squares. On each square there is an icon or simple picture of, for example, a cake or a fish There are cards on which words are printed, including "snake" and "dish", incorporating the consonant digraphs found in the word corresponding to the picture on the board. The volunteer explains the rules of the game to Brian. He is to place the picture on the appropriate square. When the fish card is presented to him, he responds with a question, asking the tutor if he knows that it is his mother's birthday tomorrow. This is followed by a story about his mother and an extended comment about her pending birthday party. Brian then moves the card toward the icon of the train on the board. Without discussion, the volunteer directs his hand to the picture of the dish to complete successfully the task. Brian then tells a story about a fish that involves his dad and him fishing. On the game board is a picture of a log. Brian begins telling a story about a tree and about birds, starting by saying, "I hate woodpeckers..." Again, the volunteer tutor directs Brian's attention to the game. The tutor offers him the prospect of an end to the game. He states that there are only two cards left to do. He shifts to an explanation of the logic of sound-symbol relationships and how to accomplish a successful problem-solving sequence, which he equates with recognizing these relationships. There is an icon of a snake on the board. Brian tells a story of having a pet snake, "but it died..." With two cards left to do, the tutor asks Brian to put the game away. Although he has requested that the child do so, it is he who actually puts it away. While this is being done, Brian tells a brief story about a three year old minnow. This sequence takes about fifteen minutes.

At 9:06 a.m. the volunteer tutor opens the New phonics workbook, level A (Globe/Modern Curriculum Press, 1958) to page 51. On page 51, students are expected to practice the consonant H. There are nine boxes, each with a picture. The bottom three pictures are of a horse, a bus and a hammer. Vertically along the side of the box enclosing each picture are four letters. Students are instructed to circle the letter which corresponds to the beginning letter of the picture. Then they are asked to "color the pictures that begin with the sound of H." Brian's volunteer tutor explains these directions to him. Brian acts sleepy. He tells a story about a treehouse that he is building with a TV in the bathroom and a bed the size of which he indicates with a sweep of his hand. His voice suggests that he is consciously telling a tall tale. The tutor persists with the unit he has chosen, although Brian is not responding to the individual activities. By 9:10 a.m. Brian becomes more distracted. He is playing with the watch on his wrist and occasionally looks up at the tutor, never at the workbook. The tutor counts down, asking Brian how many activities are left on the page. He responds with a yawn and shortly afterwards with a comment that he owns a million horses. The tutor tells him that there are two activities left. He responds by saying that he has a toy bus at home. The tutor replies by asking him to tell him the letter with which the word bus begins. Brian responds by saying "s", which is the topmost of the four letters in the square with the picture of the bus in it. At 9:17 a.m. the tutor points to the last picture which is of a hammer. Brian tells a brief story about a hammer that he owns at home. The tutor closes the workbook and puts it aside.

The volunteer tutor, followed by Brian, gets up and walks over to the carpeted reading nook. There, the tutor takes Where the wild things are (Sendak, 1963) from its place on display on top of the low bookshelf. This is the story of Max, a young boy who is punished for being "wild" by being sent to his room without supper. He daydreams about sailing to a distant land where being wild is reason for honour; The "Wild Things" make him king and he leads them in wild activity. Overcome by reality and tired of being wild, Max returns to his welcoming room and to the smell of his supper. For a boy like Brian, with a compensating imagination of some potential, this story has interesting possibilities.

The tutor and Brian sit facing each other on the carpet. He reads the story to the child. He reads quickly but with little fluidity. He does not either finger point or stop to ask questions or make comments. The pictures in this book are integral to the story but he does not refer to them or use them. This event is the final activity in the morning session. At 9:23 a.m. they go back to Brian's classroom. Brian requests permission to use the washroom and returns after five minutes.

When Brian returns from the washroom, some of the children in the class are reading and others are getting ready for the next activity of the day which is a lesson on story planning, emphasizing setting and characters. At the teacher's direction, Brian occupies himself copying the morning message which has been written on a flipchart. He works slowly and laboriously. He seems to have difficulty forming the letters. Meanwhile, the teacher begins the lesson by asking students to talk about story setting. Brian looks the other way and plays with his pencil. Although the teacher's language is complex adult talk, all but two children - Brian and a young girl - are involved. Brian places his head sideways on his desk. The teacher refers to the story of Hansel and Gretel on which the children had worked earlier in the week and asks about the character of the brother and sister in the story. The teacher asks Brian a question about them. He answers with silence.

The curriculum includes a set of story books with accompanying audiotapes of the stories. The teacher distributes the storybooks. Some individuals receive books for themselves. As there are not enough storybooks to accommodate each child, the remainder are given to groups. Brian receives one to be shared with two other boys sitting adjacent to him. The children are instructed to follow in their books as the story is read from the tape. Brian seems distracted. He swings his head from side to side and plays with his watch. The other two boys are mildly distracted. The teacher comes over to their grouping of desks. She enforces quiet and guides them in following the reading. This activity ends prematurely when the recess bell rings. The bell also concludes my observation of Brian's school morning.

Literacy Learning at Home

Brian's experience of literacy in school is different from what he sees practiced as literacy in his home. Neither print nor text are relevant to family or work life in Thomas' home and little is in evidence in the main and public areas of the home. Brian joins his father and especially his mother in watching television for many hours each day. The television set is also used to screen videos on a regular basis. Further, the home does not retain or display print in commonly used rooms such as the kitchen or living room, whether in the form of a calendar, advertising brochures, signs or notes. There are no books in the house. In addition to television, Brian had toys with which to play, and when Thomas was breeding dogs, there were dogs and pups in profusion in the house. Brian enjoyed playing with the animals.

Thomas follows his own view of the role of a parent and family member. Brian accompanies his parents to pow wows, goes fishing with his father, visits his grandparents on the reserve, and enjoyed the celebration of his birthday with the family members who came to eat birthday cake with him. During these celebrations, Thomas and the adults gathered to talk and eat while Brian, his sister and one or two cousins, who had come for the birthday party, played with their toys and presents in their bedroom. The birthday party was mostly an adult, family occasion for talking.

Thomas said that he cares deeply about his son's education. This concern expressed itself in a variety of ways. Thomas viewed school as the appropriate place in which his son was to learn to read and write. Beyond this attitude, Thomas did not involve himself with the effectiveness of the school in doing this job. This is not to suggest that Thomas had a passive stance toward school in relation to his son. He acted, in anger, on those occasions when Brian said that he felt badly because of an incident at school in which his feelings were hurt or when Thomas thought that Brian was to receive an award at a school assembly.

Thomas believed that his interest in his son's education and literacy were strongly expressed in the fact that he had enrolled in the Centre programme. He felt that this return to school modeled motivating behaviour for Brian. Brian witnessed his father leaving for school each day, after Thomas had delivered his children to their school. Brian saw his father returning from school in the afternoon. He heard his father talking about his school day and talking with me as I was present in their home and often spoke with Thomas about the Centre. He models literacy in his home by working with his computer and demonstrating that he is literate and enjoys and uses his literacy. However, much of this literacy occurs when the children are in bed.

Thomas did not read to his children, nor did he take them to the public library or to bookstores or storytelling programmes offered by libraries and other institutions. Susan was literate. She did not read to or with her children. Neither Thomas nor Susan read in the presence of their children. The family did not subscribe to either of the two daily newspapers in the city. Thomas did not buy individual daily copies of newspapers. He expressed disdain for newspapers and said he would not buy them.

Thomas did not buy newspapers. He did buy and use the Bargainfinder, although I did not observe it in his home. Thomas bought the publication for specific purposes. Thomas noted that Susan also occasionally checked the Bargainfinder for items that she wanted and then discussed items of common interest that she found in the Bargainfinder. These practices were a demonstration for Brian of a functional use of print and text.

In addition to the use of the Bargainfinder, the major literacy practice in the family was Thomas' computer. Where there were infrequent reading or writing practices in the home before Thomas bought his computer, after its purchase, Thomas read computer manuals, dog books (which he kept on a specially constructed shelf beside his computer) and wrote faxes, email and brochures continuously using his computer.

I continue to be puzzled by the way in which Brian has understood reading and writing and their relationship to computers. The complicating factor is that Thomas set up his computer in a room in the basement of the house. The room is equipped with much of the paraphernalia of an office. Print is everywhere in this room. Thomas put a latch and a lock on the door to his computer room. Only he has access to the room. Brian has been in the room with his father and has watched his father use the computer while there. Brian has not used the computer. In addition to his functioning computer, Thomas has bought and been given at least five obsolete computers and other computer components which are stacked in the anteroom to his computer room. Thomas devotes time in the evenings to using his computer and to working to make the other computers useable. Brian spends time in the basement watching television amidst the stacks of computers and computer parts. Thomas' involvement with computers in his home models their usefulness as tools for the accomplishment of practical purposes. The locked room contextualizes this functional practice of literacy in a world of its own, separate from usual home activity. It is almost as if literacy were in quarantine at Thomas' house.

The two main characteristics of literacy at Thomas' house appear to be their practicality and a reliance on modeling as a means of teaching literate behaviour. Literacy events at Thomas' house are frequent but limited in their locations and accessibility to Brian. The Bargainfinder is related to buying household or business items. The computer that embodies access to reading and writing is reserved for his father and sits behind a locked door in a room where he may go only with his father and where he may play with his toys while his father uses the computer. Thomas' literacy practices as they relate to his son seem to be built on an apprenticeship model. In this model, mastery begins with a watching stance. Thomas models literate behaviour for his son and Brian is to learn from his father by watching him use reading and writing to move toward the achievement of personal goals.

There are major differences between the nature of literacy that Brian experiences at school and at home. First, the character of literacy interaction is different. At school, Brian worked one-on-one with a tutor who spoke to Brian and responded to him as would be done with a mainstream child. In his home, there is little talk over or about reading and writing. Rather, Brian watches his father model literate behaviour as he goes about his life.

Second, the purposes of literacy in school and at home are not the same. At school, Brian may find it difficult to discern the purposes of literacy activity or instruction except to relate them to grading. At home, literacy is seen and understood as a practical and functional tool and activity. Third, home and school also differ in the presence or absence of text in literacy events and practices. Thomas uses a computer to accomplish his reading and writing tasks, although there is relatively little print in evidence in the home environment. In contrast, the classroom and the room in which Brian and the tutor work are filled with print and text at all times. Language learning activities are usually performed with text. Finally, the frequency of literacy events is different in each locale. At school, reading and writing are not only subjects of instruction but also used in most other curriculum areas. At home, literacy events are infrequent and are usually confined to Thomas and frequently done at night when Brian is asleep.

Discussion

Whose Literacy are we Promoting?

Attention to literacy learning by children in the family and community setting is the focus of the National Centre for Family Literacy. This organization, the US government and corporate funding are supporting numerous Family Literacy projects, many of which are based on the Kenan model of parent-child learning.

Tracey (1995) states that there is little consensus on a definition of Family Literacy. Nikse (1990), for example, refers to Family Literacy as low-SES parents and children enjoying shared literacy experiences. Hannon (1993) sees Family Literacy as focusing primarily on parent-child relations. Darling (1993) views Family Literacy as a preventative response to socioeconomic and political problems. Paratore (1993) highlights the gap between home and school literacy experiences in low-SES homes as the core problem which is addressed by Family Literacy programmes.

Although these definitions differ, they share common assumptions and views of literacy and literacy learning. The focus of attention in these definitions is heavily on parent-child interaction in which one parent helps one child (in isolation) become more literate through direct contact, whether intervention, scaffolding or through provision of enriching experiences. This view of the transmission of literacy is a particularly mainstream perspective. Few Family Literacy programmes, for example, consider models of transmission that are based on both parents present and interacting with a child, older siblings, grandparents and other relatives as well as community members. In many cultures, extended families and families composed of differently related and changing individuals are common.

The issue of whose literacy is being promoted in the current conceptualization of Family Literacy, as described above, is inherent in programmes that focus on "them" - people who are poor. The mainstream idea of Family Literacy does not account for the inability to buy books, watercolours, paper, scissors and other supplies due to lack of money or because in some cultures these items are not judged to be related to literacy acquisition or preparation for success in school. The idea of Family Literacy elaborated by Darling (1993) does not account for ideas of parent-child interaction based on indirect modeling rather than direct interaction. Thomas' actions suggest that he believes that the models being promoted and the attention being given to them devalue the role of schools as places where literacy can be learned and dismiss those people who believe that the school is the most appropriate place for literacy learning.

Thomas appears to believe that schooling is important and that it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that his son learns to read and write. Thomas' response to his son's school experience is not passive, nor does he appear to find it satisfying or successful. Thomas gets upset with his son's school and schooling. Bourdieu, Giroux and others (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Brodkey, 1992) who have theorized the reproduction of social order and resistance to it, describe the use and maintenance of power as a subtle and negotiated process. The meaning of community life that is offered by ruling groups in pursuit of continuing hegemony must also appeal to those whose cooperation is sought. The alternative is overt physical oppression. Usually, the commonly accepted ways of seeing the world are not imposed by ruling elites, who in any event, are not unified in their perspectives and themselves vie for dominance. Hegemony is negotiated and is therefore seldom complete, completely successful or necessarily stable.

Perhaps the word "negotiate" is inaccurate in that it connotes a form of bargaining between equals. Thomas and Brian have some influence in the process but it is hardly a situation of equality. The perspectives that support the status quo may have an appeal of their own beyond serving the interests of particular groups and not others. It may be more accurate to suggest that these ways of seeing the world are mediated by institutions such as schools. Thomas may accept some perspectives and resist others, both successfully and unsuccessfully in different areas. When asked whether he felt that he was at fault for having failed in school, Thomas replied that it was not all his doing. Schools, however, were equally to blame. He referred to Brian's school when stating that often schools simply advance children without regard for whether they have mastered the requisite skills and knowledge. He said:

> My son's school, I've noticed a lot of stuff. I've come close to losing my temper a few times down there. The attitude... But, it's their attitude that gets to me. (Interview, 6/1/96)

He related how, when Brian had approached the janitor in the school washroom and asked what he was doing, he had received a rude reply that had upset him and caused him to cry. When Brian had come home in tears, Thomas said that Susan had gone to the school and confronted the principal about this incident. He also related that Brian had been in tears when he felt that he was poorly treated by his teacher who had asked him to collect a pair of scissors from a desk and had then taken them herself. Thomas said that he had confronted the teacher who had apologized for her impatience with Brian.

In September 1996, Brian returned to the school and was again placed in Grade One with Ms. Smith as his teacher. When we spoke, she expressed the opinion that within a month Brian would again have fallen irretrievably behind his new classmates. In the situations described above, Thomas and his son were neither powerless not passive. They reacted to perceived slights and to unsatisfied expectations that the school will reinforce family values of friendliness and community bonds. They received apologies. Nonetheless, the balance of power remained in favour of the school. Brian was the loser.

What does Brian Learn about Literacy?

Paratore (1993) suggests that a major problem in early school failure by children from low SES homes is that there is a discrepancy between the home literacy experiences of children from these homes and school literacy experiences. What do Brian's school experiences - as I observed them that morning - teach him about reading and about himself? Based on four visits to Brian's school and in comparison with observations in other, similar school settings, my findings suggest a number of areas of concern. First, Brian learns that he is a failure at this kind of mental work, that he is incompetent at accomplishing the kind of school tasks in which reading and writing are embedded. Secondly, he learns that reading is the decoding of discrete sounds and the identification of letters, that reading has nothing to do with his experience, with making meaning or even with finding out what someone else is trying to communicate. Reading, then, may become an arduous, testing task, the end purpose of which is to receive instruction from others. Frequently, mainstream homes prepare children to deal with this form of learning. Children from mainstream homes often come to school already in possession of the basic skills and strategies of reading. The alienation inherent in learning these things about reading and reading instruction is reinforced in Brian's case because these ways of learning are not modelled in his home, where he sees literacy enacted in different ways. The possibility that reading can be a source of joy, solace, self-creation, change and learning recedes at school, as it does at home, where literacy is modeled for Brian as a tool for the accomplishment of personal goals.

There is a clear and unbridgeable gap between his experience of the world and reading and its content. This is evident in the way that two conversations were parallel but did not overlap or interact during the session with the volunteer tutor. One conversation was Brian's continuing flow of real and fanciful stories about animals mostly structured by and in response to the icons and pictures that were incorporated in the materials which the volunteer tutor was using while working with him. These stories were Brian's response to literature, his attempt to create "the poem" that might become both a part of him and a form of communicating something important about himself to another person. I am reluctant to suggest that he failed here. He did persist. He failed in the eyes of the tutor if for no other reason than that he did not respond at all to his "reading". The second conversation was the authoritative one. It was the tutor's conversation. It, too, was a failure in the sense that Brian did not respond as the tutor wished. The tutor held the power in this situation. Consequently, a sense of failure was transferred to Brian.

Neither the teacher nor the volunteer nor the principal seem to be aware of the possible negative consequences of the actions in which they are involved. On the contrary, the teacher, the principal, and the volunteer tutor believe themselves to be helping Brian. Bourdieu (in Giroux, 1983) attributes the success of schooling in reproducing symbolic hegemony to the naturalness with which particular representations of culture are presented in schools. Schools, like hospitals, still enjoy a legitimacy that derives from being symbols of hope, order and significant purpose in the Western tradition. Within them, relationships are sanctioned. To question their values or procedures is difficult, not least because questioning strikes at the core of the intentions of the professionals who are, after all, there to help. To question the good intentions of the teacher or the volunteer tutor (or of the researcher) is probably beyond the will of Brian or of Thomas himself. To do so would "betray" their own ingratitude.

Reading is a label that applies across life in the real world. Although Thomas learned to read from his friend Rod, and his everyday capacity to read environmental print (and to write in a form that was understandable to others) was objectively adequate to the tasks at hand, he still did not believe himself able to read because he was comparing his reading ability with the reading standards legitimated by schools. Such reading is lodged in a secondary discourse with which he is unfamiliar and to which he had attached the label "failure" in relation to himself and his school experiences. What Brian learns about "reading" and the tasks of reading here in the sessions at school will be applied by him continually in various other areas.

In the tradition of Heath (1983) and others, Purcell-Gates (1995) applied a socio-cultural perspective to interpret the literacy learning of an Appalachian mother and son. This study highlights how, when print is not a part of a culture, it is effectively invisible to people within that culture. Although not as unintegrated as the Appalachian family, and less aware of their differences from mainstream society, in many ways the story of Thomas and his son parallels that of the family studied by Purcell-Gates. The mother and son in Purcell-Gates' study were also the subject of discrimination that labeled their culture as both different and "not as good as". Although Thomas and his family live with print and strive to be a part of the world of print, they feel that they are similarly rebuffed by Brian's school. This form of discrimination was evident in the Appalachian mother's dealings with the school principal. The story that Thomas told about his response to Brian's treatment by the janitor and by his teacher describes a similar experience. The capacity of our schools to accommodate cultural difference has remained unchanged from Thomas to his son. Brian's morning in school, as described above, casts into question whether it is the school experience of literacy, the home experience or aspects of both, that is the problem.

In keeping Brian home from school, Resistance Theory would suggest that Thomas has reached the "limits of opposition". His resistance is becoming destructive to the extent that denying Brian schooling is limiting his ability to raise his consciousness about the full extent of his oppression. Giroux (1983) states that the most effective resistance in schools is often that which seems to acquiesce in order to turn education against the system. The experience of Thomas and his son hints that the father may perceive a deeper and more definitive reality in his son's engagement with schooling. Possibly, he understands that school ultimately has nothing to offer Brian except the certainty of failure and its attendant self-doubt.

Conclusion

Darling (1993) implied that there is a strong and close link between perceived socioeconomic crises of poverty, racism, unemployment, crime and family instability and Family Literacy programmes sponsored by the National Centre for Family Literacy and by corporations such as Toyota, as well as other programmes based on the Kenan family literacy model. The view that Family Literacy programmes will solve many intractable social problems appears pervasive in the literature that I have reviewed (Handel & Goldsmith, 1989; Darling, 1993; Daisey, 1991; Paratore, 1993). It expresses itself in an optimism about the effectiveness of Family Literacy experiments in the absence of convincing empirical studies.

Brian's experience and Thomas' understanding of his son's literacy learning and his responsibility in it suggest that the question of literacy transmission is more complex than is reflected in many of the programmes supported by the National Centre for Family Literacy. Parents' views of their role may legitimately vary from the mainstream views embodied in Family Literacy programmes. The role of the school must be considered carefully, not only from the perspective of parental expectations but also in relation to what it teaches some children, and the degree of power that it has to effect change in socioeconomic problems. If these programmes are to address the need to prepare children to succeed in schools where reading and writing are associated with success, they will have to recruit the views and the cooperation of parents like Thomas rather than look upon them as evangelical material.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to fashion a portrait of Thomas as a literacy learner. First, I examined the nature of Thomas' participation in formal and informal literacy learning situations. Second, I analyzed Thomas' reading behaviours to develop an understanding of the meanings that he attached to this aspect of print literacy. Third, I looked at Thomas' engagement with writing and focused on the role of computers in writing and as tools of control for him in his life. Finally, I presented an analysis and discussion of how literacy is understood and practiced in the context of Thomas' family and particularly in relation to his son and his literacy experiences at home and at school. In the portrait that I have painted, control emerges as a dominant feature of Thomas' attachment to literacy. In the conclusion to this chapter, I trace the theme of control as it threads its way through Thomas' participation in literacy learning.

I use the term "control" to label diverse attitudes, goals and actions clustered around Thomas' experience as he engaged in literacy learning. At various times, Thomas suggested that learning to read and write better was a part of fulfilling his role as fathering of children who succeed in school and in life. He also said that literacy would afford him some "face" and the opportunity to express his opinions publicly. I see these statements as expressions of the general idea that Thomas understands literacy as a way to exert control over his life. "Control" also means "being his own boss", not taking orders from other people, giving direction to his own life and having influence over his family and the fate of his children.

Co-existing with Thomas' desire to control his destiny is the history of his own school failure as he understands it and the repetition of the cycle of failure in Brian's school experience against which he struggles. Thomas' interpretation of his school experience is failure marked by classes and schools that went on their appointed way without regard for him. He felt himself in trouble but saw his teachers as concerned only with the successful students. He expresses parallel feelings when he remarks that in his son's school, students are promoted without regard for their progress. Thomas is neither stupid nor passive. He and Susan challenge school personnel over real or imagined slights and manage to extract apologies. However, he is simply without adequate power to influence the course of his son's school career. A compelling basis for Thomas' wish to control his own destiny can be found in his experience of the reality that school and bureaucracy have little to offer except the certainty of repeated failure.

During the time that I observed Thomas, control was primarily expressed in two of his projects — dog breeding and the revitalization and sale of computers. Possibly, his initial reading and writing gains and his introduction to computers gave him the platform from which to take the plunge into these projects. Once these entrepreneurial efforts were in progress, literacy became a tool to support and advance them. These projects embodied Thomas' understanding of control. He originated the idea and made the decision to undertake each project; he was working at what he enjoys doing; he was comfortable with the hands-on character of the work, and he could work alone and at a self-determined pace. Thomas was able to reconcile his marginal literacy and his need for independence with the help of a network of friends and family. In his pursuit of these two projects, another side of his will for independence exhibited itself when he suggested that a benefit of these businesses was that he would not have to work with other people or take orders from them. Dogs and computers do what they are told to do without questioning or challenging him

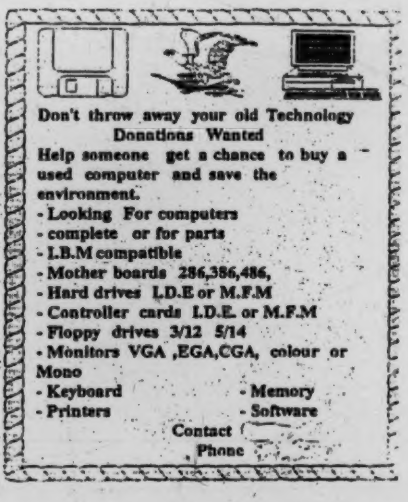
The Centre programmes in which Thomas participated included formal group activities such as the Peer Tutoring Group Project and the Men's Group as well as several Learning Groups and Learning Circles. Although the form and philosophy of these programmes acknowledged beginning with student needs, they were invariably structured and controlled by Centre personnel. Thomas participated in these "pre-cast" programmes but the form of his participation varied with the degree of control that he could exercise over himself and over the activity. At the Centre, his participation was generally passive. The formal activities in which he was involved were organized and structured by staff. In these formal activities, he generally responded to requests and defended his views and values against or in contrast to those that were advanced by the instructor.

Thomas' involvement in informal literacy learning activities inside and outside of the Centre paralleled his commitment to his business through which he hoped to establish his independence. Both at the Centre and increasingly at home, Thomas developed his reading and writing strategies and skills with the help of other individuals in relation to his two business projects. He participated more actively in these informal learning situations where he had determined the purpose of the activity and where that purpose was related to his business interests. In these informal learning settings, control meant two things to Thomas. Firstly, it was a question of who decided in what learning activity he would engage and who would lead that activity. Thomas wanted to control these activities and make the decisions about the focus of relevant learning. Secondly, and related to the meaning of control in the choice of activity, was the sense of control that he associated with learning that supported his two projects, the purpose of which was to give him the independence that he craved.

Thomas' reading and writing activity was governed by the functional demands of the business projects which he wanted to organize. In his daily life, Thomas was exposed to numerous forms of print. He was selective in his choice of print and this choice again reflects his desire to control his own life using literacy to help him establish viable businesses. He seldom read stories and expressed little interest in reading stories to and with his children. Although he came into contact with bureaucratic forms of text, he expressed little enthusiasm for dealing with them. He frequently relied on others to help him with this material. On the other hand, when Thomas read the Bargainfinder or computer software manuals, he successfully interacted with specialized text. Reading became for him an activity that had as its purpose a practical outcome related to the businesses through which he saw himself taking control of his own fate.

Thomas' stated views of writing strongly suggest that, in his eyes, his own writing was closely linked to the use of computers. Initially, computers offered Thomas a sense and form of control over his writing that he believed he did not have when he wrote with pen and paper. He used this control to become a prolific writer. He wrote publicly through the Centre Newsletter about how he wanted other people at the Centre to know him. Increasingly, he used his computer writing skills to develop his business projects. He did so to acquire materials and to advertise his services.

Recently, when I visited Thomas at his house, he told me that he had sold a number of reconditioned computers to students at the Centre. He anticipated increased sales. He gave me copies of two documents that he had prepared on his computer for use in his business. One was an advertising flyer that he had written to solicit obsolete computers and parts from individuals and businesses (Figure 6-1). The second document was a sales contract, a replica of a legal document (Figure 6-2). In the Sales Contract, there is provision for the recording of the serial number of the computer being sold, a schedule for installment payments and a statement that the sales item remains Thomas' property until the full payment is made, failing which the computer reverts to Thomas' property with no refund to the purchaser. The people to whom Thomas is selling his reconditioned computers are students at the Centre and their friends.

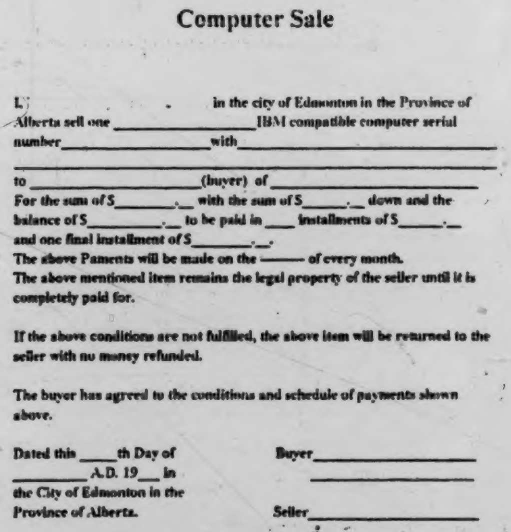


Don't throw away your old Technology
Donations Wanted
Help someone get a chance to buy a used computer and save the environment.

- **Looking For computers**
- **complete or for parts**
- **I.B.M compatible**
- **Mother boards 286,386,486,**
- **Hard drives I.D.E or M.F.M**
- **Controller cards I.D.E. or M.F.M**
- **Floppy drives 3/12 5/14**
- **Monitors VGA ,EGA,CGA, colour or Mono**
- **Keyboard**
- **Printers**
- **Memory**
- **Software**

Contact
Phone

Figure 6-1. Thomas' Advertising Flyer



Computer Sale

I, ________________ in the city of Edmonton in the Province of Alberta sell one __________________ IBM compatible computer serial number____________________with______________________________________
____
to ______________________(buyer) of ____________________________
For the sum of $________.__ with the sum of $______.__ down and the balance of $__________.__ to be paid in ____ installments of $______.__ and one final installment of $________.__.
The above Paments will be made on the ——— of every month.
The above mentioned item remains the legal property of the seller until it is completely paid for.

If the above conditions are not fulfilled, the above item will be returned to the seller with no money refunded.

The buyer has agreed to the conditions and schedule of payments shown above.

Dated this _____th Day of	**Buyer____________________**
__________ A.D. 19___ in	**____________________**
the City of Edmonton in the	
Province of Alberta.	**Seller____________________**

Figure 6-2. Thomas' Sales Contract

Whether he succeeds or fails in his attempt to establish himself in the computer sales business, Thomas has crossed a long bridge and entered a community and a way of seeing the world in which some forms of literacy are an integral part. Thomas' soliciting flyer and sales contract do not seem to be mushfake literacy. If there is a "trick" in these documents it is the trickery of business and legal discourses and the control they exercise over the student who will purchase the computers that Thomas is selling (Brodkey, 1992;

Taylor, 1996). His soliciting flyer sets up a tenuous, even false link between donating your old computer to him for resale to his account and the appeal of helping the poor and the environment. The sales contract, on the other hand, casts the purchaser as unreliable and potentially desperate and in need of being controlled by text fashioned into a legalistic and bureaucratic framework. While Thomas has adopted some of the forms and perspectives of the mainstream community, it is important to remember that students at the Centre who would otherwise be unable to own and use personal ccomputers now do own them as a result of Thomas' efforts.

Chapter 6
IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Overview of the Chapter

Many people - children and adults - struggle to learn to read and write. We know little about how people who labour in this arena experience literacy. Thomas has danced with literacy for most of his 35 years. This study sought to understand what reading and writing and learning to read and write meant to Thomas, how he saw himself as a reader and a writer, the nature of the experiences that shaped his understanding of literacy, and the way in which he negotiated his participation in literacy learning. The study found that Thomas did not fit the stereotype of the marginally literate adult who is dependent and isolated. He saw himself as an adjusted member of society. At the Centre, he viewed his literacy learning as a private and independent activity which was directed to his personal business goals. He moved his learning and participation in those directions in spite of the Centre's pressure toward group and community participation. Thomas read selected complex material with relative ease. He said that he considered himself a reader. Nonetheless, he did not equate reading with a view of himself as a literate person. Thomas viewed writing as a critical aspect of his literacy. He equated writing with full participation in society. An unexpected finding of the study was the role that computers as tools, played in Thomas' evolution as a writer.

I presented the detailed findings of the study as a "Portrait of an Adult Literacy Learner" in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In this chapter, I place the study findings in perspective. For each of the main findings of the study, I have set out what I consider to be important implications. The implications extend into both the practice of and theorizing about literacy education in schools, community-based adult programmes, workplace literacy projects, and early intervention programmes such as family literacy projects. I also consider more general theoretical and ideological perspectives as expressed in the work of Gee (1989), Giroux (1983, 1985b), Fingeret (1983), Freire (1970a), Heath (1983), Jurmo (1989), and Purcell-Gates (1995) among others.

The findings of this study highlight the limited and provisional nature of current research findings in the ongoing search for an understanding of the lives of marginally literate adults and for related and reasonable grounds for policy development. In making suggestions for further research, I outline some questions of interest for future studies in literacy education, about computer use, about the utility of the concept of independence and social networking and about the explanatory power of resistance theory and post-structural analysis. Ethnographic and modified ethnographic methods are sparsely applied to the study of adult literacy and adult literacy learning. Questions of ideology, of cultural values and of power have arisen in the course of gathering and analyzing the data for this study. I outline, discuss and examine the implications of my experience in relation to these questions in a separate section entitled Reflections on Ethnography in the Study of Adult Education. The chapter ends with a minor foray into theory making in adult literacy learning.

The implications of the study have been organized as follows:

1. Literacy and control
2. Adults as participants in literacy programmes
3. Adults as readers
4. Adults as writers
5. Literacy, family and schooling

The implications which I have drawn from the study findings are not made in the spirit of generalization. Thomas, like everyone else, is unique. I have focused on his uniqueness and tried to understand it through his own experience. I view the findings of this study as grounds for heuristic reflection and questioning. Thomas' view of literacy and literacy learning are occasions to think about issues which researchers and policy-makers identify and label, research, write about, and address in policy. His views, as I have constituted them, and my comments on them, offer insights and speculation about these issues. In this way, these views contribute to the ongoing debate about the social nature of learning to read and to write (Geertz, 1979; Bloome & Bailey in Beach et al.., 1992).

Implications of the Study Findings

Literacy and Control

The societal view of illiteracy is reflected in the character of the public debate about it, periodically rising to "crisis" state, and subsequently subsiding until another report or statistical survey is publicized showing the "dangerously" high percentage of adult "illiterates". The predominance of medical and military metaphors in this debate suggest that the structure of the public literacy issue is cast in an apocalyptic form - the battle of good and evil - and is focused on the deficits of the marginally literate individual. In the public debate and as a consequence of it, marginally literate people are usually understood and understand themselves as dependent (and therefore a drain on the public purse), incompetent, stupid and outsiders, or not members of the club (Horsman, 1990; Smith, 1989).

Literacy is one aspect of how people are defined and define themselves. Gee has written that discourses dictate our fate (Gee, 1989). Of the question of the power of discourse and of hegemony, Giroux has written in contrast, in discussing Resistance Theory, that hegemony is never complete (Giroux, 1983). Similarly, Foucault writes that even dominant discourses offer room for resistance (Foucault, 1980).

Thomas' seesaw struggle between acceptance and rejection of the societal definition of himself as marginally literate, and the experiential and intuitive counter-claims to which he appeals to support his efforts to enter the mainstream, constitute a major theme that I saw emerging from my research. I have described his efforts as his attempt to control his own fate. Thomas struggles to see himself and to be seen as an independent person. Further, he is driven to integrate himself into the mainstream of his society while trying to retain his individuality-authenticity.

In adult literacy theory and practice, the idea of marginally literate adults as independent people motivated to maintain and enhance their independence has been mostly ignored and otherwise made subservient to the perceived priority of becoming more literate as the means to achieve the goal of independence. Freire, for example, views the process of becoming independent — in the sense of seeing the world critically — as a process of naming the world, or becoming literate (Freire, 1970a). Similarly, community-based adult literacy and learning programmes advocate for the seeming contradiction of student centredness and community involvement. In these programmes, learning and literacy are understood as important in themselves. However, literacy is also seen both as a means of social change and as a vehicle for achievement of individual goals.

There is some research indicating that control of one's life is of prime importance to marginally literate adults. Many do not view themselves as dependent. The issue of independence and illiteracy was addressed by Fingeret (1983) in her study of marginally literate adults in the United States. She showed that for marginally literate adults as for most adults, maintaining independence was of prime importance. They did so by establishing and maintaining a network of friends and family within which they were able to trade their own skills and abilities for the literacy skills of members within their networks in order to negotiate their way through a literate world while still guarding their autonomy. A corollary of her research is that literacy plays a more limited role in the life of marginalized literate adults than we have usually believed to be the case.

Similarly, a number of studies have explored control and dependence among marginally literate women. Traditionally, many women have been denied adequate opportunity to learn to read and write. Studies of women's literacy learning have contributed to the literature of control and its relationship to the promise of literacy (Atkinson & Ennis, 1994; Brokop, 1991; Hayden & Wahl, in press; Horsman, 1990; Teeling, 1990). For most of the women in these studies, attending literacy classes was the way that they envisioned taking control of their lives and changing them.

Thomas' dedication to controlling his own life and to making a place for himself in mainstream society without substantially changing himself challenges the idea that control of one's life is a consequence of becoming literate in the dominant definition of the term. Thomas' experience suggests that literacy accompanies and follows from acting in the world to enhance control over one's life. When Thomas arrived at the Centre, he was a man who had been independent. He used the Centre as a means to maintain the sense of independence that he valued but he did not directly use literacy itself to do this. He used the Centre's computer resources and the network of friends that he developed while there. He showed minimal interest or participation in reading while at the Centre. His mastery of the conventions of writing changed little during his time at the Centre. However, he acquired a less school-bound and more functional way of seeing his writing as he gained confidence as a writer. Most of the writing that he did as a result of his involvement with the Centre was for the purpose of setting up and building his entrepreneurial skills.

It took me some time to appreciate the centrality of independence in Thomas' life because, viewed from my initial perspective, he was dependent. Further, his efforts to enter the mainstream via business success seemed doomed to failure and had, in fact, already partially failed. His hope of a new and more respectable life did not seem to me to be realistic. He has been a welfare recipient during the whole time that I have known him. He is, according to most definitions, dependent for his survival on public support. This financial support is organized to treat Thomas as if he were an irresponsible child and it "motivates" him with the unpredictable threat of random and sudden expulsion from social assistance. Thomas worries about being cut from the welfare rolls. He has also stated his shame at being on welfare. To be free of this worry and shame is partially a motive for his attempts at setting up his own businesses. Thomas' immediate dependence is a monetary one. The kind of lack of control over his own life that this (welfare) occasions was seldom referred to by Thomas. Similarly, money as a reason for breeding dogs and for repairing and reselling computers was discussed once and then only briefly. Neither was success or failure in his business efforts a basis for determining the state of his control over his own life. His dog breeding business was abandoned. His computer business most probably also had little possibility of supporting him. It seems that, in part, the potential to create a business, to be able to define change for himself generates the courage to think of himself as an independent man.

In her study of women learning to read and write in rural Nova Scotia, Horsman (1990) described the failure of their efforts to achieve the independence that they wanted as an effort that generated the courage to struggle and in that sense to be subversive, or to question their condition and to define the conditions of change in their lives. I view Thomas' efforts similarly. On the surface, Thomas bears out Gee's (1989) deterministic view of the power of discourse and of the socioeconomic system that underpins it. Even if the political structure were to change, it is unlikely that the powerless Thomas would become a member of the literacy "club". Powerless and having failed as yet to establish the businesses that he wished to in order to enter the mainstream, Thomas still illustrates the implications of Giroux's (1983) and Foucault's (1980) understanding of the elasticity of dominant discourses: Thomas' story centres on struggle. It is this latitude for and capacity to struggle that allows him to retain the belief in his control of his own life, his ability to continue to control it and his efforts to define and redefine his own future. This belief and these goals possess a subversive potential. Rather than being beaten down, Thomas envisions possessing both the material goods that are available in society and the respect that he feels other people receive. The belief that these elements are within his grasp may help him to question not only how to acquire them but also why he does not have them or have an equal opportunity to acquire them.

Adults as Participants in Literacy Programmes

In the second year of my field work at the Centre, I traveled to another city in the province with some staff members and students from the Centre to participate in the annual conference of the Provincial Association for Adult Literacy. Membership in the Association and attendance at the Conference spanned the spectrum from community-based programmes to formally structured and traditional ones. My field notes, initially written while sitting in the audience of a plenary session, reflect my strong negative reaction to what I judged the condescending attitude to students of tutors and literacy coordinators. "Participation", as reflected in this session, seemed to me to mean the degrading spectacle of selected students parading before the audience under the supervisory eye of their teachers to repeat prepared statements about how good they now felt because they could read.

After a year at the Centre, my conception of student participation in literacy learning was differently developed than what I witnessed and recorded at the AAAL conference. The principles of student-centredness and of community involvement which are a part of the Centre programme are commonly held in most community-based programmes across the country. Participation was of particular interest to Sarah, the Centre Coordinator. She went to great lengths to create conditions under which students would begin to exercise their capacity to make decisions about their own lives through their involvement in their own learning and in their community. Sarah made strong efforts to animate these principles, particularly through student participation in decision-making at the Centre.

My research found that Thomas participated more fully in activities that he controlled and which were practically and personally oriented. Mostly, these activities revolved around building and learning how to use his computer for personal reasons. He also accepted an appointment as a student representative on the governing board of the Centre. Although he was a member of the Centre Board, this activity did not become important to him. On the occasions when he mentioned it to me, it was done in a disparaging way. Thomas' other participation in the Centre was primarily of a private nature. He contributed when, for example, he helped build a portable blackboard frame or a bicycle rack. Most of these activities were not group activities, nor did they seem to draw him in to the life of the Centre. After two years, Thomas began to appear less frequently at the Centre. When he was there, he devoted all of his time to working on the computers to learn procedures that he could not master on his home computer but which he learned at the Centre with help from a staff member. Eventually, he struck a bargain with Sarah. She sent him "assignments" via fax or email. He prepared the assignments on his home computer and faxed or emailed them to her. Sarah seemed troubled by this arrangement, caught between her commitment to each student and to the belief in participation in the community as an integral part of literacy learning. Thomas' non-participation in Centre ideology together with his commitment to some of its content (learning to write; computer literacy) is reflected in his deliberate physical separation from the Centre and the maintenance of the umbilical cord of fax and email, both perfectly suited to his technological self-involvement. Thomas was a candidate for the kind of "consciousness raising" that underlies the interwoven themes of community orientation and student centredness that are so well exemplified in the Centre programme. Yet, he clearly did not respond to these values and goals. He chose to work more privately, to learn in situations where he felt himself to be in control, and to commit himself to personal and individual goals.

Thomas' experience at the Centre prompts questions about some aspects of community-based adult literacy programmes. In the Foreword to The land that we dream of... (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991), St. John Hunter writes that community-based programmes and the people who organize and work in them oppose the idea that small advances in reading and writing can change much in the lives of those who have the least access to the legitimate rights of citizens in a democracy. It is this rationale that accounts for the consciousness-raising group and community-oriented activities that structure community-based programmes. However, the need to have one's consciousness raised must always be a decision made by another person or persons because the state of being without critical consciousness does not allow one to understand the need for such consciousness. There is more than irony in this situation. While the community-based philosophy and its principles have helped us to debunk the premise that marginal literacy is associated with lack of intelligence, the student-centred and community-based approach may still carry the embedded assumption that adults who come to these programmes are dependent and isolated or alienated from society and their community. These assumptions can confuse coordinators, tutors, teachers and volunteers into defining those who come to community-based programmes as deficient in these ways and obscure real distinctions among students, making response to these disparate needs more difficult.

While some people who came to the Centre were looking for structure and professed to have found a place where they wished to stay, Thomas did not express this view. He was an independent person and valued his independence. He had the facility to create and sustain a network of friends and family within which he could call upon help with his literacy needs and reciprocate with his valued skills. Like most of us, he preferred to have some control over his learning and strove to create situations in which this was the case. He enjoyed varying the conditions under which he worked. He wanted privacy and sought it. When he needed help, he sought it too. Like many students at the Centre, Thomas did not respond to group work as enthusiastically as did the staff who organized it.

In their study of five adult students at the Centre who were deemed "successful", Malicky et al.. (1997) observed a clear dedication by students at the Centre to personal rather than community goals. In contemplating the possible conflict between community-oriented goals and a commitment to student-centred teaching and learning, they suggested that the development of individual goals was a necessary stage preceding the capacity to formulation of community consciousness. They stated that the community-based approach might make room for recognition of developmental stages in student growth from submerged consciousness to social commitment, viewing individual growth through the prism offered by the self-actualization theories of Maslow (1968) and of Rogers (1961).

Even if we are prepared to accept the major assumption that there is a developmental hierarchy of goal setting and that commitment to community goals is a higher form of goal setting than engagement with personal goals, the case of Thomas challenges this viewpoint. There is some evidence to suggest that Thomas was in the process of developing a critical consciousness. For example, although he was busy trying to create a business, money did not seem to be his main consideration for doing so. Being seen as a legitimate member of the mainstream community was of greater importance. Nonetheless, Thomas stated clearly that he was engaged in writing, in computer repair and in dog breeding for the love of these activities and that this commitment was more important to him than financial success. In the sense that he has begun to label the world (Freire, 1970a), Thomas is developing his social consciousness from an individual foundation. Whether Thomas has developed a social conscience or not, if we accept the view that student development of community-oriented goals is our goal, we are faced with the dilemma of assigning people like Thomas — those who do not conform — to the debit side of the ledger.

This contradiction exposes a fundamental tension and dilemma in community-based programmes like that of the Centre. The tension and dilemma emerge in part from the divergence between ideology and actuality. There is a reluctance to distinguish between those learners who are more and those who are less dependent on the Centre for meaning and direction (Fingeret, 1983). Together with the imperatives of community goal setting and its assumptions of dependence and alienation from community, this process results in an allocation of resources and programme development that favours dependency. Classes and one-on-one teaching and learning are replaced by an emphasis on group rather than individual work. In her struggle with Thomas' challenge to this structure, Sarah recognized this basic conundrum. Nevertheless, in the 1996-97 school year, the programme at the Centre was organized into Learning Circles. All students were assigned to one of three Circles, depending on the assessed degree of literacy individuals "had". Programming for individual students was delivered through these Circles. Seen within the context of the emergence of group work as a dominant format for literacy learning at the Centre, Thomas may be seen as an example of how this emphasis pushes away and disenfranchises some of the very people whom we say that we want to attract to and help through these programmes.

Within the philosophy of community-based programming, it is possible to deal with this problem by exploiting the potential inherent in the idea of student-centred learning. Student-centredness is considered a cornerstone of community-based adult literacy programming (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991). However, student-centredness is often defined more in terms of the needs of the programme than of the student (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991). Listening to learners becomes a form of Language Experience Activity; belief in learners is understood as reminding us that everyone can learn; equality is seen as a teacher-student relationship issue; and involvement in learning is a matter of finding material that is relevant to a student's life. Goal setting is defined against a desire to avoid traditional forms of assessment. The concept of student-centred learning can emphasize the importance of beginning with the student's definition of his/her needs and goals. This is different from the student-centred idea described above. This emphasis on individual goals implies that individual and community goals are equally valid reasons for and the end results of learning, without judging the former as a waystation enroute to the latter.

To accept that an adult student may wish to pursue purely individual and private goals also implies some changes in the approach to programme organization in community-based organizations. Three of these changes are: choice of tutors; tutoring training, and making ideological differences explicit. One-on-one tutoring is usually available within community-based programmes. Often, there is a choice of tutor on the part of the student. However, this choice is also often serendipitous and usually uninformed by elements other than personal impression. If private goals are to be taken seriously, then attention should be given to more systematic and explicit processes for bringing students and tutors together. One aspect of such a process is to give priority to the training of tutors in one-on-one work. Individuals who volunteer to tutor are often equipped with a strong initial motivation to "help the less fortunate". This source of motivation cools in the absence of training. It is not an adequate basis on which to respond to concrete needs. Even among literacy coordinators, there is a recognized lack of background in the conceptualization of reading and in appropriate responses to remediation. Recently, the STAPLE (Supplemental Training for Provincial Practitioners in Literacy Education) software has been developed to address this need among literacy coordinators. It is little wonder that tutors are also often in need of training. The STAPLE programme (Campbell & Brokop, 1996) is comprehensive, based on accepted, current theory and research and designed for individualized learning. Rather than being available for literacy coordinators only, it might be made accessible to tutors in a systematic way so that they too would be prepared for the choices their students make.

Finally, it is important to make explicit the ideological differences that underlie the emphasis on group and on individual work, and on community and private goals that are associated with these kinds of work. Too often, the critical literacy and oppositional stance embodied in community-based programmes is explicit to the leadership of the programmes but not to the students. If individual and private goals are to be honoured equally with community values and goals, then it is important that the ideological basis for these differences be spelled out for students so that they become more fully aware of the implications of their choices.

Adults as Readers

Thomas considered himself a reader when he first came to the Centre. He did not arrive there primarily for the purpose of learning to read. Of the literacy learning activities in which he engaged at the Centre, reading was less prominent than writing, tutoring, or talking. Those skills that were needed in the negotiation of his daily routine were so much a part of his repertoire that he did not enunciate them. Thomas used reading for specific purposes. While his reading was purposeful, it was neither simple nor superficial. His practical use of reading was directed at long range, comprehensive and decisive goals. Thomas directed his literacy primarily toward achieving the projects that he had decided would ensure his independence. Thomas' reading occurred with the most frequency while he was at home in his computer room, either reading computer manuals for the purpose of setting up hardware or software (usually with a literate and computer-wise friend present) or when reading the Bargainfinder. In examining the Bargainfinder I showed how this is a densely organized weekly advertising magazine requiring the use of a variety of reading strategies and skills in order to access sought-after information. Thomas routinely and effectively read the Bargainfinder to locate dogs and find computer parts. A large part of the meaning of his reading was its application to these projects. He appears to view reading as a personal tool to achieve specific concrete goals. I do not believe that Thomas saw reading in itself as a distinct and separate actor phenomenon. It was an aspect of the tasks and business or personal goals that he set for himself.

Thomas presents a picture that challenges the view of the less literate adult reader that is articulated in the literature. Research (Elish-Piper, 1997; Purcell-Gates, 1994; 1995; Purcell-Gates et. Al. 1995; Rigg, 1985; Teale, 1986) suggests that marginally literate adults use reading primarily for practical, immediate and routine purposes in their day-to-day lives. Studies record reading tasks of marginally literate adults as including reading stories to their children, reading ads in newspapers and elsewhere, reading the Bible, and reading memos, announcements, information sheets and newsletters brought home from school by their children. Thomas' use of reading is more unified by an overall goal and is more self-directed than the reading activities that are reported in studies of other low-income and less literate individuals. In addition, the material that Thomas reads is more complex than that which, in the research, is usually associated with marginally literate adults.

In contrast to writing and oral language, both of which are seen as generative and communicative, reading is widely viewed as a receptive and passive activity (Askov, 1991; Freer & Alexander, 1996). This is particularly so in community-based adult literacy programmes in which reading is viewed as a vehicle of social control and writing is seen as a possible means of social action. At the Centre, reading was given somewhat less time, less exposure and attention than writing. There were Learning Circles and writing classes. The class which I organized and conducted was the only one of which I am aware that focused on reading. This is not to suggest that reading did not occur. Individuals who were engaged in private study could be seen reading at tables. One-on-one instruction between volunteer tutors and students did centre on reading. Nonetheless, process writing was a strong and organized presence at the Centre. In addition to writing, oral language was a focus of attention. The Men's Group engaged in talk as did the Women's Group. Talk was a mainstay of the Art Class. Listening was important, particularly when guest speakers were invited to present and when general meetings were held. In this array of language activity, less prominence was given to reading.

The passivity associated with reading seems to make it a less appealing community-based option for marginally literate individuals. As Thomas illustrates, however, passivity need not be the inevitable condition or outcome of focusing on reading. Two elements that are noteworthy in Thomas' case are first, the genuine, practical character of the material which he read, and second, the personal and practical goals which his reading served. For the most part, Thomas had to go outside of the Centre to find the reading material that he felt he needed to accomplish his business purposes. Neither the Bargainfinder nor computer and software manuals and other business-related texts were available to him at the Centre, although they are generally commonly available in the city. Similarly, his personal goals eventually led him out of the Centre, to spend more time at home pursuing his reading and writing goals. Reading can be a change agent and a generative behaviour when it is associated with the kinds of goals and materials that Thomas has chosen. It would seem that this behaviour together with these materials and goals are bound and shaped by personal, even consumerist, rather than community goals. In this sense, the use of these materials and the promotion of these goals would require a major ideological shift for the Centre as for other community-based programmes. Such programmes may have to reconsider the degree to which they conceive of reading as ideologically indivisible.

The study touched on another dimension of the reading experience of the marginally literate Thomas. He viewed some reading behaviours as inappropriate to and in conflict with his view of literacy. This view was particularly evident for reading in the family context. For example, when I urged him to read at home with his children and suggested ways in which he might successfully do this, he rejected my suggestion. Although I saw Thomas and his son Brian in the presence of books and computer software, I never observed Thomas either reading to or with his son or instructing him or involved with him with books or with the written word.

Possibly, like some other students at the Centre, Thomas feared embarrassing himself in front of his children by reading haltingly. In light of Thomas' capacity to read complex material, this does not appear to be a reasonable account of his lack of interest in reading with his children. Other factors, such as a lack of money to buy books and a fear of library fines similarly cannot account for his indifference. I believe his behaviour is best understood in socio-cultural perspective: Thomas viewed reading with a child as an inappropriate form of literacy support from him or learning by his son. It appears that in Thomas' view, helping his son learn to read is most properly done through modeling behaviour. Alternately, it is possible that he views reading as a personal and a private matter.

In response to the numbers of children who are failing to learn to read to school standard or who are entering school unprepared for the transition to school literacy, it has become commonplace to advocate for the importance of parental reading to infants and very young children at home. We know that many factors influence a child's capacity to make a successful transition from oral and home literacy to school literacy (Clay, 1991). Still, the admonition to read at home and regularly to your child eclipses all other factors. Thomas' rejection of this model is pause for thought. When put in a socio-cultural perspective, Thomas' rejection of this model in favour of one with which he appears to be comfortable and which he does not wish to abandon casts the idea of reading to one's young children, and possibly the emphasis on early literacy, into relative context. The admonition to read to one's child is a socially constructed and ideologically maintained view. The metaphor of literacy that plays beneath and around this particular view is one of literacy as nurture, as family and as caring. It is a judgmental perspective that allows us to find Thomas wanting and therefore deserving of his station in life. It allows us to exercise the evangelical impulses that in Canadian, US and British societies has accompanied the public meaning of literacy. Thomas' resistance may, as we view it, result in barring his own and his son's full participation in society. Yet, Thomas retains the power to reject our metaphor, and in doing so, points to the futility that characterizes much of the effort of family literacy programmes and school campaigns to help Brian and others like him.

Adults as Writers

I found that Thomas imbued writing with the greatest importance and meaning. He appeared to think of writing in terms of Before and After, as an issue of value, and as connected closely with computers. Thomas began writing when he first enrolled at the Centre and during my period of field work there, his writing output increased, as measured for example, in the annual numbers of articles that he wrote for and that were published in the Centre Newsletter. The volume of Thomas' writing was augmented by the writing that he did in the medium of email, particularly toward the end of the study period. In addition, there were marginal gains in his competence as a writer, measured in terms of the impact of his communication, his mastery of the conventions of writing and the tools that he used to fashion effective and pleasing text. This competence was difficult to measure because much of his work was edited by others or had been vetted by computer spell checkers. Where unedited material was available, it seemed clear that gains in the craft of writing were not great. Thomas' mastery of form remained confined for the most part to narrative and some expository texts, although his business ventures occasioned some business and advertising forms of writing. His spelling showed marginal changes. For the most part, he continued to write in a personal and oral language voice, although his business communication was presented in appropriate forms. Thomas continued to use the strategy of finding environmentally available parallel forms from which to copy format and spelling.

At the Centre, students often engage in autobiographical writing. If the volume of available autobiographies is an indication, this practice is common in community-based literacy programmes and elsewhere. Hayden and Wahl (in press) for example, found that writing in general, and autobiographical writing in particular, offered powerful motives to literacy learning among women participating in the B.O.O.K.S. Family Literacy Programme. In one instance, they describe a story written by a mother for her young son when he grows up. Similarly, at the Centre, students wrote, revised and edited diligently. Often their stories were chronicles of surviving horrific childhoods. The findings of this study support the view that writing, specifically writing about oneself, is desired by adult students and is often a powerful beginning to their reconsideration of their lives and their literacy.

The evidence of Thomas' involvement with writing and the computer suggest significance in writing that goes beyond this affirmation. Moffett (1968, 1979) and others (Britton et al.., 1985; Graves, 1983; Atwell, 1987; Emig, 1971) suggest that the craft of writing should not be confused with the higher level of writing that he labels as "revision of the inner voice." This Vygotskian perspective (1962, 1978) ("Thought is born through words") allows us to see that, for Thomas, the meaning of being able to write functional English lay in the satisfaction that he associated with overcoming his sense of isolation from society. He felt a keen sense of frustration at not being able to carry out his familial responsibilities both among his siblings and parents and within his own family. Writing meant success for Thomas, as he saw it, in the eyes of his children. It meant integration into the life of the community and it meant overcoming his sense of failure and inferiority. In a sense, writing allowed Thomas to rewrite his own history, and he did so with panache.

I want to extend this interpretation to encompass the idea that, with the aid of computers, Thomas was able not only to rewrite his story but also to re-invent himself (Kerby, 1991).

One of the attractions of writing seems to be its active and generative character. We actively do it, and we do it for the purpose of communicating a message to other people. What we communicate is up to us. We can speak without being present; we can disguise ourselves. For Thomas, the talk, reading, learning and the adoption of new perspectives about himself and about the world acquired in the very social Centre environment, in social interaction with a community that was new to him, was reciprocated in writing and in the potential offered him by the computer. He took that potential a long way. He was able to make substantially himself into someone other than who he had been. Before his introduction to computers, Thomas was able to present the picture of himself as a family man that he wished to promote, through his articles in the Centre Newsletter. With the use of a computer, he was able, for example, to communicate on the internet and by email with people to whom, in the past, he would have felt inferior. He was able to become the dog breeder and the computer repair entrepreneur that, in his pre-writing and pre-computer past, he might have felt unable to believe himself capable of doing.

Myers (1995, p. 582) suggests a succinct definition of literacy when he describes it not as the ability to use signs to communicate "some conventional meaning" but as the "ability to subvert signs." Myers argues, and I agree with his sentiment, that the mastery of literate behaviour should go beyond acceptance to active " control, even manipulation [of] how signs are used to name and value the world." Myer's conception of literacy echoes Moffett's view of writing as the revision of inner voice (1979). Thomas' writing, particularly his writing using the computer as a partner rather than as a tool (Ephratt, 1995) seems to have taken him beyond the exploration of self through writing to the reconstruction of self in the world, with control of self and renaming of the world within his grasp.

The increase in the quantity of Thomas' writing and some of its changes are linked to his introduction to, fascination with and use of computers. He thought poorly of his handwriting, grammar and spelling. He said that he was impatient with the time that it took him to write and to revise his work by hand. He seldom wrote because of these reasons. He believed that the computer allowed, even encouraged him to write and to communicate with people whom, previously, he would have felt embarrassed to contact. Above, I noted that Thomas used the computer as a partner in reinventing himself. Here, I briefly develop this line of inquiry in the direction of the question of whether or not computer use in adult education suggests that it may serve as an instrument of social reproduction.

My interpretation of Thomas' experience with computers in learning to write is ambiguous in relation to this question. Thomas' literacy learning was directed at advancing the projects of dog breeding and computer sales. As he became more adept at and involved in using his computer to write and as he wrote more articles and letters and requests for information to companies and individuals with it, this attitude changed. In June 1996, when he reflected on his view of writing, Thomas stated that having a voice in the world was more important than money. Did Thomas perceive in his engagement with computers and his partial mastery of them, a value and a "calling" that went beyond the idea of the computer as a simple tool with which to accomplish specific tasks? Perhaps part of an answer to this question lies in the observation that while the computer is used to produce a product, the product itself is part of both the computer and of Thomas. When he locates his satisfaction at the intersection of these two areas, he is going slightly beyond the confines of learning how to use a computer to do a job. To the extent that computers aided his writing, they may also have a subversive potential that is counter-intuitive to the belief in the socializing and integrating power of technology.

This view of the subversive process that characterized Thomas' experience with computers speaks to issues of significance within adult education and in broader trends within public definitions and uses of literacy. Within the last decade, Workplace Literacy has become both an identifiable phenomenon and a controversial issue in attempts to define and redefine literacy, (Fingeret, 1991; Gowen 1992). Fingeret defines Workplace Literacy as the capacity to work satisfactorily for others. Computers have become the mainstay of most work. In light of their ubiquitousness, mastery of computer technology may become an important aspect of literacy for work. The emergence of Workplace Literacy, as a definable and publicly accepted category of literacy work, highlights the central place that computers are coming to occupy in addressing the various questions about learning to read and to write better among marginally literate adults. Computers are seen in general, and in adult literacy work in particular, as a reality (Freer & Alexander, 1996). Much of the literature not only accepts the advent of computers; computers are seen as unblemished tools with unparalleled potential for integrating marginally literate adults into the needs of the "free market." Research about computers in adult and school literacy programmes focuses on the advantages and extent of their employment and barriers to their use. For example, Freer and Alexander state that "...we want to know how computers were being used to enhance adult literacy instruction." (p.56). Thomas' involvement with computers suggests that fundamental questions of a person's relationship to literacy and his or her capacity to use it for different purposes are invoked in the use of computers in education. As in the case of Thomas, the experience of computer use may lead to a broad "subversion of symbols" or to this possibility.

Literacy, Family and Schooling

The beliefs and values that I brought to my relationship with Thomas and to my observations of and involvement in his life included the conviction that being an attentive parent would help boost his children out of the cycle of marginal literacy and poverty. This belief remained unaffected by Thomas' recollection of his early school experiences, particularly since he stated that he blamed himself as well as his teachers for his school failure. When Thomas was reluctant to take books from the library to read to his children and when he declined my suggestion that he read to them at bedtime, these actions served to help me find Thomas deficient as a parent.

My direct involvement with Thomas' son Brian was at first a personal matter incidental to the research. Thomas was the focus of this study. However, it was my observation of his son Brian in school that provided the opening through which I could begin to appreciate the links between school, home, Centre, father and son. Brian's experience in school allowed me to see schooling as Thomas might have. Correspondingly, my observations of Brian at school during one morning as well as my involvement on three other occasions with his teach and principal allowed me to question my beliefs about the relationship among school, poverty, difference and success. The reflections that follow about schooling, literacy and difference and about "The Cycle of Low Literacy" come from my exposure to Brian's school experience. My visit was random and probably as representative as any other morning in Brian's school experience. In addition, my observations that morning parallel Thomas' recall of his own school experiences.

Thomas described himself as having failed in school. Brian was failing in school. On the morning during which I observed Brian among his classmates and teacher and with his parent-volunteer tutor, he was in the process of being unable to communicate across a cultural and discourse gulf. Thomas described himself as being all but invisible to his teachers when he needed help to master new learning. Brian was experiencing a similar process. He was learning to blame himself for this situation. Bernstein (1971) describes the situation of Thomas and Brian when he conceptualizes Restricted and Elaborated Codes with reference to the role of education in supporting class barriers in England. Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) is a parallel idea that he uses to theorize the means by which societies reproduce themselves in the face of apparently destabilizing inequalities. Cultural capital is the set of values and ways of seeing the world that students from privileged and mainstream homes share with the school as an institution. Although both Bourdieu and Bernstein ultimately seem to settle on a similar response to inequality and hopelessness, Gee (1987; 1989; 1991) and Delpit (1986; 1988; 1992) define the general and accepted approaches to the debate. For Gee, primary discourse determines fate in the absence of political change. He offers the alternative of "mushfake literacy". Delpit argues for deliberate and efficient teaching of dominant discourse alongside primary discourse as a means of overcoming inequities perpetuated by schooling. Delpit's description of the teaching of secondary discourse suggests that it is a form of mushfake literacy. According to her, motivation is recruited by asserting that students will learn a form of language (a secondary discourse) that is to be used for the purpose of participating in the riches of society without relinquishing the student's valued primary discourse. Both Gee and Delpit seem to point to the potential of "mushfake" as a response to educational inequities. I will take up the possibilities inherent in computers as tools of mushfake literacy when discussing Thomas' use of this technology in writing. Here I consider the concept of mushfake literacy in the classroom as unduly optimistic whether from Gee's or Delpit's perspective. It rests, as does Heath's (1983) response to discourse differences in schooling, on the problematic assumption that teachers can understand difference as such and not as "inferior to" and that they will accept the sociocultural perspective that such beliefs demand. It is hard to credit the possibility of either, in enough quantity to effect major change in the foreseeable future.

The positions expressed by Bernstein, Bourdieu, Gee and Delpit and others assume that people like Thomas and Brian will remain loyal enough to schooling to continue to attend school. This is a questionable assumption. Thomas dropped out of school when he was fourteen years old. Many days, Brian and his sister Lynn stay home from school. Giroux (1983) accounts for this kind of response to schooling and to Thomas' sporadic and unsatisfying skirmishes with Brian's teacher and principal as a form of resistance that has turned counterproductive, inasmuch as it hurts Brian's ultimate ability to receive the education needed to change effectively the status quo or his son's situation. Giroux's account is also optimistic. It presupposes that ultimately there is a reward for persevering in school. Gee and Delpit at least sense and acknowledge the inevitability of continued failure. Having experienced school failure himself, Thomas understands that school has little to offer Brian except failure. It seems to me that this understanding underpins his frustration, hostility and lack of time for Brian's schooling.

In her study of an Appalachian mother and son, Purcell-Gates (1995) came to understand that in their home and group culture, print was non-existent and unnecessary. She contends that the roots of the difficulty that the son, Donny, was experiencing in school was in the invisibility of print to him. My reading of Thomas' and Brian's experience suggests a variant of this account of the Cycle of Low Literacy. Thomas was all too aware of the absence of a link between schooling and success for him and for his son. Their response was a realistic one based not on their culture but on a reading of the way that the dominant culture treats "difference."

Brian's experience in school, as illustrated that morning, also speaks in a pragmatic way to current developments in school responses to children who encounter difficulty learning to read and write. In the city, emergent literacy has come to define broad areas of the school literacy mandate. Within the concept of emergent literacy, much of the focus of school district energies is on "early intervention". This focus is realized in Family Literacy programmes, Reading Recovery, pre-school (for example, "Success by Six"), and inter-generational programmes. At the core of these early intervention efforts is a belief that the parent-child relationship is a critical factor in literacy transmission. Further, parent-child interaction is viewed as consisting of a particular range of activities, including, for example, reading to the child, responding appropriately to a child's questions about language and its use, and participating in enriching language activities with the child.

While some family literacy programmes and early intervention projects recognize the classroom basis of school success, they often do not address this need. Rather than changing the nature of classroom interaction, they attempt to change the child and the family. There is more than an implicit attempt to maintain a status quo in this strategy, there is a great deal of futility. For example, although Thomas has been enrolled in an adult literacy programme and been exposed to training in "Reading to Your Child", he did not read to his children. As in the case of Donny and his mother, Thomas' cultural and family values and way of life do not work with the mainstream construction of reading to one's child at bedtime. Nonetheless, Brian came to school equipped with a broad inventory of life experiences both in the city and on the reserve where his grandmother and other family members live. Brian has a vivid imagination. My initial reaction to Brian's difficulties in learning to read and write in school was to assign two of my students to work with him on an intensive schedule. Brian did make some progress in mapping sounds to symbols. Still, by the end of the school year, this progress seemed barely measurable. At the beginning of the next year, Brian was in the same classroom again, in the same grade and with the same teacher. Brian's teachers and volunteer aides may have good intentions but my observations lead me to question whether they are attuned to the cultural differences that separate him from them, nor do they see the need for change on their part. Only Brian is expected to change.

Overcoming the marginalization of culturally and academically different children certainly involves attending to early intervention and to after-intervention learning processes. However, building these programmes means, in part, investing in recruiting pre-service teachers from culturally different communities and training teachers to begin to see different students differently. Classroom cultures must broaden to embrace different forms of acceptable knowledge. Pre-service teachers must learn not only to understand cultural difference and recognize strengths but also be able to revitalize their view of students who have been through programmes. Otherwise, students who return to their classrooms after having attended expensive programmes will be caught up again in a downward spiral of a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

The concept of Family Literacy advocated above is different from that described in the recent literature (Darling, 1993; Daisey, 1991; Handel & Goldsmith, 1989, Paratore, 1993). Corporate sponsored programmes such as the Toyota Families for Learning Programme and the involvement of the National Centre for Family Literacy search for more effective ways to promote mainstream literacy models and values as a means to combat social strife. The approach for which I argue is the recognition of multiple literacies, respect for the integrity of families and homes, regardless of SES status, and attention to changing not only the children and parents whom we "target" but also our own understanding of the literacy options available to all of us.

Suggestions for Further Research

Alvermann et al. (1996, p. 117) state that they view every text that they create or review "as partial and in the process of becoming." The suggestions for further research that follow represent my attempt to indicate the directions in which this study might be taken. I have outlined five areas in which I believe there is a need for further academic study. These areas are: (1.) Exploring the strengths of marginally literate people; (2.) Examining the role of computers in adult literacy learning, and particularly, their potential in developing critical perspectives among adult learners, and conversely, their role in promoting social reproduction; (3.) Researching the characteristics, viability and generalizability of Fingeret's (1983) notion of networks among marginally literate local and cosmopolitan adults; (4.) Testing the applicability of Resistance Theory and possibly extending its descriptive power in relation to adult student's successful negotiation of basic literacy programmes, and (5.) Application of sociocultural and critical perspectives to aspects of Intergenerational and Family literacy processes and programmes.

Balancing Oppression and Transformation

Freire's 1970a study, Pedagogy of the oppressed and subsequent reports of literacy work in Guinea-Bissau are among the few works that have been written about the role and uses of literacy in individual and community transformation. There is a large and productive literature that has focused on mechanisms of oppression, the ways in which literacy serves as a gatekeeper for the status quo (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Donald, 1991; Giroux, 1983, 1985a; Gee, 1989; Fish, 1980; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Stuckey, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Ziegahn, 1992). Research reported by Fingeret (1983) showed how many marginally literate people work to maintain their independence and negotiate their way through a literate world. The research reported in this study had its origins in a parallel attempt to look at the positive and transformative potential of adult literacy students and the factors that contribute to successful participation in adult learning programmes. The study focused on how one individual was trying to transform himself and become recognized as literate. Hopefully, this study will contribute to knowledge about how adult literacy learning can be understood and adapted to support success. It is suggested that further studies be conducted that focus on individuals in the process of learning or of change. Studies of individual women, of older and of younger people enrolled in programmes and of other minority group members engaged in improving their literacy, will expand our understanding of how people engage in programmes. Such studies may also indicate how, in what directions, and under what conditions marginalized literate adults transform themselves and their surroundings in the process of becoming more literate.

Computers

During the past seven years, personal computers have spread into almost every area of activity in society. At the Centre, donations of obsolete computers were used to set up a small lab. It was thought that technology would attract and motivate some students to write where they had been reluctant to do so with a pen. It was also felt that familiarity with keyboarding and with some applications programmes such as word processors and spread sheets would enhance student employability.

Research about computer technology in public schooling and in adult basic education is growing but still limited in scope. It is mostly confined to reports about the benefits of technology, about successful installation procedures and ways of using technology in the classroom. Other research has surveyed programmes to identify areas of weakness and of need. Needs that are identified include funding and training.

Thomas' experience with computer technology raises different and cautionary questions about the role of computers in adult education. There is little research addressing pedagogical problems and curriculum conflicts that may arise as a result of computer use in adult education. For example, as Thomas became more involved with his computer, he became more isolated from his peers at the Centre. Eventually, he came to the Centre solely to use the computers. Often he remained at home to work on his computer. To what extent do computers encourage students to work in isolation and to what extent do they lend themselves to group work and community goals? Further research is needed in this area.

Thomas used the Bargainfinder to search for computer parts, became involved in the cycle of purchase - obsolescence - purchase - upgrade that is characteristic of the world of personal computers. He used money that was needed by his family to buy computer parts. To what degree does computer involvement lay the groundwork for participation in consumer society in an uncritical way?

That the gulf between dominant culture and discourse and powerlessness is very great is hardly in dispute. A question at issue (Gee, 1987, 1989, 1991; Delpit, 1986, 1988, 1992; Leslie, 1997) has been whether or not this gulf can be bridged without radical political action. If so, what means are available to help poor and underprivileged people to do so? Gee (1989) introduced the concept of "mushfake literacy" which he contends is a way of appearing to have a secondary discourse that one does not actually have. Thomas demonstrates the capacity of his computer to serve him as a form of mushfake literacy. While face-to-face interaction remains paramount, electronic interaction and communication is becoming more common. In this regard, the actual capacity of the personal computer to bridge the gap between dominant and subordinate discourses remains to be studied systematically.

An important issue in educational research has revolved around the question of the role of education in social reproduction. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Foucault (1980), and in the US, Giroux's (1983) elaboration of Resistance Theory, have addressed this question extensively and insightfully. It has seemed a foregone conclusion that computers, coupled with the implicit assumption of Workplace Literacy programmes that economic decline is a labour problem, were an instrument of social reproduction. The findings of my study suggest, counter-intuitively, that Thomas' involvement with computers supported his mildly subversive view of his use of literacy to have a voice in the world rather than to make money in it. Case studies of attitude changes of individual, marginally literate adults learning to use computers would shed further light on this unexpected phenomenon.

Independence and Social Networks

The concept of independence, social networks, symmetry and reciprocity were first defined and researched by Fingeret (1983). Her study presented a picture of marginally literate adults that was substantially different from the stereotype that was widely accepted and often formed the basis for adult literacy policy and programmes. I found it surprising that Fingeret's findings and their implications have not been explored further. In the research presented in this document, I have used Fingeret's conceptualization of independence and the symmetry and reciprocity of social networks to help me understand Thomas' decision to enroll at the Centre and to explain in part his success there. I noted that Thomas' networking skills seemed to be transferable to and functional in adult literacy learning and that they may have contributed to his attraction to and successful participation in the Centre. The study reported here suggests that further research in this area may contribute to extending further and refining Fingeret's concept and my observation. Are networking skills more of an advantage for an individual in a community-based or a traditional programme? Can networking skills be adapted to encouraging learning and retention in adult programmes? Fingeret's contention that marginally literate adults are motivated by a need for independence has received little further confirmation. Further research is needed to investigate whether "independent" and "dependent" are usable categories with which to understand less literate adults.

Resistance Theory and Post-structural Analysis

The concept of resistance as outlined by Giroux is attractive as an account for adult dropout from basic literacy programmes. Quigley (1992; 1993) has used this concept to outline categories of resistance of adults in and outside of programmes. Although Giroux (1983) has explored the theoretical dimensions of the concept of resistance elegantly, and although his perspective presents itself as a powerful way to conceptualize participation and non-participation in adult education, Resistance Theory has proven to be a difficult concept to operationalize. I found this to be the case in attempting to analyze Thomas' manner of participation in group activity at the Centre. While I was convinced of the utility of Resistance Theory to account for and provide a reasonable interpretation of Thomas' participation, analysis of the data was elusive. The main question became, "What constitutes convincing data in this case?" The dilemma is, in part, to decide on whether the concept of "resistance" is to be operationalized as observed data (accounts of other's interpretation of motives), or as enacted data (analyzed from records of the event unfolding — usually transcripts of talk). For example, discursive behaviour in the classroom may be seen as a focus of analysis to explore student resistance and its relationship to active co-construction and negotiation between teachers. Collins (1995) uses Resistance Theory to try to explain patterns of educational failure in an elementary school. His post-structural analysis of the enactment of resistance in the form of transcripts of verbal interaction also suggest the co-construction and situational character of resistance. A post-structuralist perspective on resistance that favoured enacted data yielded interesting results, helping to direct my efforts toward analysis of verbal interaction. My analysis of Thomas' participation in a Peer Tutoring Group Meeting, based on a transcript of the meeting, revealed a similar, rich picture of the co-construction of Thomas' subtle resistance in his interaction with Sarah, with me and other participants in the meeting.

While structural approaches to interpersonal situations has stressed underlying causes, post-structuralists (Collins, 1995) have asserted the situational, improvised and culturally constituted nature of particular events and the choices of particular persons as the proper source and focus of resistance and resistance research. This is a potentially promising focus of attention for research in adult education, not only in the context of Resistance Theory but from a more general perspective. It encourages us to look to actual talk as the data of study. In the process of focusing on talk, we also begin to look more fully at the views, meanings and constructions through which adult literacy students view their education.

Family and Intergenerational Literacy

Nikse (1990; 1993) and Tracey (1995) have suggested the need for more rigorous, academic evaluations of Family and intergenerational literacy programmes now in operation. My research proposes some elaborations of this theme and some new directions in which Family Literacy research might go. First, the potential to blame the victim and to use these programmes to advance political ideologies is strong. A sociocultural and a critical approach to evaluation would aid in a more comprehensive understanding of current programmes by revealing some of the particular values and beliefs that underlie them. Second, my research indicates the complexity of intergenerational literacy and the variety of contextual factors at play in the process in which children learn about the meaning of reading and writing from parents and other adults in their community. For example, many current Family Literacy programmes appear to be based on a narrow view of parent-child interaction possibilities. Research that explores the child-parent literacy interaction in sociocultural perspective may contribute to the refashioning of programmes to attract those low-SES families who are put off by models and programmes that do not reflect their modes of language interaction in the home. Third, my study reveals the importance of not only the home but also the school in encouraging the successful transition from home to school literacy. Research is needed that explores the inter-relationship of these two settings of literacy learning.

Finally, while Heath (1983) advocated working with classroom teachers, changing the pedagogical attitudes of pre-service teachers is an area with potential. Some research suggests that student attitudes change very little between entrance and exit from teacher training programmes (Rodriguez, 1993). However, little research has been done in the area of the effectiveness of teacher educators. Further research in this area might examine the attitudes of teacher educators and the values that teacher educators communicate to pre-service teachers through their own teaching. Effective models and curriculum for teaching critical literacy to pre-service teachers is another promising area for research that may directly and positively affect Family Literacy programmes and schools.

Epilogue

At the end of May 1995, the Centre and the Co-op in which it was housed were evicted from the building that they rented from the city. The building stood on land that the city had been persuaded to give to a Concert Hall Foundation so that a Centre for the Performing Arts could be built there. The building, which was the former court house, was torn down and the Concert Hall raised on it. Today, this small piece of the city that stood on the border between the centre of "downtown" and the "inner city" has been decisively claimed by orderly aesthetics.

The Inner City Services Co-operative began an odyssey of almost a year looking for a new home and being rebuffed by potential neighbours wherever it looked. The fear of poverty, crime and falling property values rose up against it at each stop in its effort to find a home for itself. In the meantime, the Co-operative found space for its vital operations in small offices at scattered locations in the inner city area.

Although not connected to the Co-operative, students at the Centre had voted to stay with it. In the interim, the Centre went its own way, first finding a temporary home in a large room at the YWCA. Thomas and I and two other men students helped move the Centre out of the old courthouse building and into the YWCA. The heavy moving was made possible with help from a battalion of eager people from the Co-operative. By the beginning of June, the Centre was in business again at the "Y". A few weeks later, in mid-June, the Centre ended its school year and closed until mid-September.

In the Spring of 1996, the YWCA national board decided that it could not afford to maintain its building. The women who lived there, some of whom were students at the Centre, were moved to various other locations. The cafeteria, daycare and other programmes were terminated and the building was closed. The Centre moved a second time, just in time, to a building that would also house the Co-operative after additional renovation.

Our friendship ebbs and flows with events that preoccupy Thomas or me. My involvement with the Centre lessened. In September 1995 I returned to lead reading and spelling groups on Thursday mornings. Thomas attended these meetings and his participation there is accounted for in the body of this report. By January 1996, I was devoting my full attention to university and dissertation commitments. Thomas was attending the Centre less frequently. Thomas dismantled his dog kennels and sold his dogs and pups. His business had not gone the way that he had expected and his costs were more than he could afford to pay. It was difficult to find buyers for the volume and breeds of pups that he had. Also, his involvement with his computer was growing and he hoped to develop computer repair and sales into a small business. He was accumulating computer hardware parts in the basement of the townhouse to which he and his family had moved. He was spending as much money as he could on additional parts that he located through the Bargainfinder and by visiting a local "Big Box" office supply store.

Thomas' life was becoming more complex in other ways as well. In the Winter of 1996, Thomas and Susan had adopted her infant grandnephew. Susan was pregnant at that time. In September 1996, Susan gave birth to their fourth child, a girl. At about this time, Thomas was concerned with what he felt was his inability to pay his bills. Worried about finances, Thomas looked to his immediate situation and complained about the cost of heating his rental house. He had a dispute with his landlord about what Thomas said was the landlord's commitment to new windows and other measures to improve the efficiency of the house, especially during the cold winter months. In September 1996, Thomas and his family moved about ten blocks east to a small townhouse in a public housing project. The children continued in the same school. In October 1996, Thomas' telephone was put out of service. For several months after that, I did not contact him and he did not contact me. Recently, Thomas enrolled in a business development course. He is now working on a detailed plan for his computer business. We meet frequently to discuss how to prepare the plan. In October 1996, I spoke with Brian's teacher. She was the same teacher in whose class Brian had been the previous year. Brian was again in Grade One and his teacher was concerned about Brian's progress in learning to read and write. She said that Brian's new young classmates were rapidly learning to read and, that within weeks, she felt that he would again be left behind the other children.

For a long time, I felt that there was a very sad completeness to Thomas' life and to the life of Brian. It was frustrating, even infuriating. It was so easy to find Thomas and his son at fault for this sadness. Now, I am not at all certain that completeness is the way to understand this man's life with literacy. He is neither crushed nor converted. He has neither succeeded nor failed. He continues to struggle. In the poem "Anthem" Leonard Cohen (1993) wrote, "Things fall apart. That's how the light gets in." The curious thing about incompleteness is how it can breed hope.

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APPENDIX A

Letter and Research Description Submitted to the Board of Directors of The Centre

June 8, 1994

Herb Katz,
1-145J, Clinical Services,
Faculty of Education,
Department of Elementary Education,
University of Alberta,
Edmonton, Alberta,
Tel. 403-492-0961/ Home: 433-1724.

The Board of Directors,
The Centre,
Edmonton, Alberta,

Dear Board Members,
I first came to the Centre at the end of October 1993. At that time I came to observe and interview students and staff at the Centre for a research project being run by Prof. Grace Malicky. The research was and still is trying to understand how it is that some people stay and others don't stay in adult learning programmes. I have been lucky enough and happy to have been taken in by the warmth, calm and hopefulness of the Centre community. In the process I have learned a lot about the potential of people, about adult learning, about literacy in life and about my own abilities and purposes. I've also had the opportunity to become involved as a researcher on behalf of the Centre in the Peer Tutoring Project and as a teacher/facilitator with the reading and writing group that meets each Tuesday and Thursday morning.

As you may also be aware, I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Elementary Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. I have completed my course requirements for this degree and am looking forward to beginning major research that will be a dissertation to earn the Ph.D. degree and to contribute to knowledge and to the world in some small but meaningful and original way. My experience at the Centre, commitment to and interest in it lead me to want to do this dissertation research at the Centre on a question that arises for me from my thinking about the Centre and from my own professional interests. I am writing this letter and presenting the attached description of a research project for your consideration and the approval of the Board to undertake during the 199_ school year.

I look forward to discussing this project with you and answering any questions that you have about it. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

H. Katz

Assessing Student Progress in a Community Based Adult Literacy Programme

Often, evaluation of student progress is unwelcome and unhelpful but also unavoidable. Although standardized tests such as *The Test of Adult Basic Education* are popular, it is possible to understand the idea of evaluation uncoupled from this kind of testing. It is possible to create a set of principles for evaluation of progress in literacy that are consistent with the values of the Learning Centre and are acceptable both to students at the Centre and to other adult learning programmes in the community as well as to funding agencies.

Building on the experience of the Peer Tutoring Project, I suggest a participatory approach to accomplishing this goal. In consultation with the Centre Coordinator students would be asked to participate in a Working Group on Student Evaluation. This group would meet once each week for two hours between October 1994 and June 1995. I would act as group facilitator. The immediate goal of the group would be to write a manual including a set of principles to guide student evaluation practices, some examples of literacy as it is used in this community and some suggested testing practices. My dissertation research report would include an interpretation of the process through which the evaluation standards were arrived at. This report would be available to the Learning Centre and could provide a useful view of how the Centre works and the potential of student participation to those interested in it.

This project would benefit the Centre by offering it a set of community developed principles for evaluation where none now exist. Students would learn some general research skills to complement and support their own learning. Students would again be involved in Centre and community decision-making. I would continue to make myself available at the Centre not only as the facilitator of this group but also as a class teacher/facilitator and tutor. The participation of the Centre Coordinator on an ad hoc or full-time basis would be welcome. No other commitment on the part of the Learning Centre is sought.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form to Conduct Research with Study Participants

At the moment, the title of this research project is: "Assessing Student Progress in a Community Based Adult Literacy Programme." The researcher is Herb Katz. His office phone number is _______. His advisor is Dr. Ruth Hayden. Her office telephone number is ________. If at any time during your participation in this project you have any questions or concerns about it, please phone or otherwise contact either of these two people.

I understand that this research project will focus on trying to find out what counts as literacy at the Centre and how we can learn to evaluate our progress using this knowledge and I agree to participate.

I also understand that:

1. I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason;

2. My name will not be used in any reports on the research; and

3. Tape and video recordings made of our interviews and meetings will be listened to or viewed only by Herb Katz and Ruth Hayden and that they will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

I have read this Consent Form (or have had it read to me) and have understood it or had it explained to me to my satisfaction.

________________________	________________________
Participant	Researcher: Herb Katz
Date______________________	Date______________________

APPENDIX C

Ethical Considerations

The research project described in this document conforms to the ethical standards for research of the University of Alberta.

Guideline 1

There are no foreseeable risks to study participants. If the possibility of risks should arise during the course of the study participants will be advised immediately, orally. There are no concealment procedures in this study. Study field notes are viewed as open to participants review at all times.

Guideline 2

A copy of the participant "Consent Form" is attached to this document. Students will be advised orally by the researcher in the company of a programme staff member of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their possible participation and of their right to anonymity and withdrawal at any time. There will not be any participants under the age of 18 years.

Guideline 3

Participants will be informed of the nature of the study in a group meeting, individually, orally and via a "Consent Form." Programme staff will be present during these discussions. Potential participants will be advised that: Anonymity of individuals and of the research site will be assured in field notes and in written documents. All names and locations will be disguised. All audio and video tapes will be available only to the researcher and his supervisory committee members. These tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. These provisions will be stated in the "Consent Form."

Guideline 4

The researcher submitted a proposal and request to pursue the study at the "Centre" to the "Centre" Board of Governors. The researcher was questioned at a monthly Board meeting and formal approval for the research was granted by the Board, including two student representatives. Further, the research proposal includes the "Consent Form" developed for this study. In addition, the question of anonymity of participants and locations is fully outlined in the proposal in discussion of data gathering procedures.

Guideline 5

The dissertation advisor will receive regular reports of the research and be informed of any possible ethical problems. She will have access directly to participants as they will to her, as outlined in the "Consent Form." Field Notes will be regularly reviewed by the dissertation advisor.

APPENDIX D

Interview Schedules

Peer Tutor Project Initial Interview

Purposes:

1. To collect information about concepts, attitudes, expectations, question, knowledge and experiences about Peer Tutoring;
2. To ask Peer Tutors and those being tutored to compare their current views about Peer Tutoring with those they held before they started in the Project.

Introduction

The Learning Centre has a project ot train students to tutor other students. It's called the Peer Tutoring Project. We're doing some research to learn about peer tutoring and how it helps people learn at the Centre. To start the research we want to find out what people already know or think about peer tutoring. I'd like to talk with you about this.

Introduction (for new people)

With reference to people's files, review how they found out about the Centre and what they wanted to learn while here. Talk about how it's been going.

1. Sometimes people here work with a tutor. Imagine that you are working with a tutor, or think about what you've seen here.

1.1 What does a tutor do? community tutor; peer tutor.

1.2 What do you like about working with a tutor? How does a tutor help you learn?

1.3 What don't you like about working with a tutor?

1.4 Is there anything else that you'd like to say about this? (Are your ideas the same or different from your ideas before you started peer tutoring?)

2. What do you think that people need to know or be able to do to be a peer tutor?

3. How do you feel about having another student tutor you?

4. Would you be interested in being a peer tutor?

Course Evaluation Interview Form

Date______________

1. What is your name? ____

2. How long have you been attending the Centre?______________________

3. What course did you attend?____

Literacy Development (working on your own); Math; Reader's Group; Writing with Mary N; writing with Marlene; Government; Women's Group; Men's Group; Art; Other (specify)

4. There were ______ classes in this course. How many did you attend?__________

5. What did you want to learn when you started the course?

6. Did you learn these things in the course?________

If the answer is "no"; Please tell me why you did not learn them. For example, did the instructor teach something different? Did you decide to work in something else? Are you still working on learning these things

7. Did you learn things in this course that you did not plan to learn?_________

If The answer is "yes": Please tell me what you learned. Was it good to learn these things?

8. How was the instructor helpful to you?

9. Were there any times when the instructor was not helpful?_________

If the answer is "yes": Please tell me about these times

10. What did you like best about this course?

11. What did you like least about this course?

12. Do you have any suggestions for ways to improve the course?

13. Would you have liked to know "how you were doing" in this course?____________.

If the answer is "yes": Please give me some suggestions about how to do this.

14. Did the instructor treat you with respect?

If not, please explain how the instructor was disrespectful to you. Give some examples.

15. Was there a good feeling in the class? Give me some examples of how there was or wasn't a friendly feeling in the class16. Was the instructor helpful and patient?

____

If not, give an example of how they were not friendly and helpful.

16. Did you feel free to voice your opinions and feelings about the topics during discussion in the class?_________

If not: Why didn't you feel good about speaking in the class? What would help you to feel more comfortable to speak in the class when you wanted to?

17. Would you like to add any other comments about the course that could help us to meet your needs?

APPENDIX E

What Thomas Read

Thomas read the following narratives:

(1.) Bouchard, D. (1993). If you're not from the prairie... Vcr: Raincoast Books.

(2.) Goble, P.1988). Her seven brothers. N.Y: Bradbury Press.

(3.) Goble, P. (1985). The great race. N.Y: Bradbury Press.

(4.) Kusugak, M. (1993). Northern lights. The soccer trails. Toronto: Annick.

(5.) Munsch, R. (1980). The paperbag princess. Toronto: Annick.

(6.) San Souci, D. (1990). North Country Night. NY: Doubleday.

(7.) Sendak, M. (1963). Where the wild things are. NY: Harper Trophy.

(8.) Thaler, M. (1989). The teacher from the black lagoon. N.Y: Scholastic.

(9.) Van Allsburg, C. (1988). Two bad ants. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

(10.) Wood, D. (1992). Old turtle. Maryland: Pfeifer-Hamilton.

Thomas read these books during reading class. They were read orally, each person at the table taking a turn to read, stop and discuss passages. Students were free to "pass" if they did not want to read.

Thomas' most frequent and longest duration, independent and scaffolded reading was concentrated in the wide variety of computer manuals that he owned and used. These manuals were related to the hardware and software that he bought and installed, including manuals for Windows (DOS), Microsoft Word for Windows, Winfax Lite fax software, and brochures and descriptive literature for computer software. He also read selectively from a book on fighting dogs from among a series of specialized books on dog breeds that he bought at a flea market.

APPENDIX F

What Thomas Wrote

1992

1. "Working on My Van" Writer #6, vol. 1, no. 6, (December 1992) p.3.

   He tells how he can take care of vehicles: He relates the stages of fixing up a camper van that he bought in poor condition. Then he says that it can be used for camping (presumably by his family).

2. "Powwow" ibid., p.4; (December 1992);

   Tells how he enjoys going to powwows with his family and about the kinds of dances and his children's involvement in them and with his wife's family.

1993

3. "CB Radios" Writer #7, April 1993, p.5

   short stories about his different adventures and experiences with CB radio, structured by generalizations about them. Most of the stories were about his family. Unified by the idea that CB radio can be fun and useful.

4. "small Pleasures" ibid.;(April 1993).

   A family idyll about time spent together with his wife and daughter and especially his son, fishing and going to a powwow.

1994

5. Autobiography, "I Was Born on June 20, 1961" (September 1994) UNEDITED

   The first writing Thomas did on his own computer at home. It is his autobiography, concentrating on his early years then jumping to the present when he talks about the death of his ex-brother-in-law and about his decision to begin breeding dogs. Told in the first person, chronologically. He structures the material so that it shows his decision to return to adult learning revolved around his concern for his children

6. Note left on my door (July 14th 1994) written by Susan, she signed for T.;

   He had invited me to a powwow at Frog Lake. They left early and came by and left a note on the door with directions on how to get there.

7. "Yesterday's Kids and Tomorrow's" Letter-to-the-Editor, Learning at the Centre. (December, 1994), p. 25;
   He states that children are more difficult these days then ten or twenty years ago (hard to believe that he doesn't realize that he was as difficult - he described it to me as such!). He uses this as background to write that his children will be going to school soon and he is worried for them. About family in a more abstract way.

8. "Peer Tutoring Meetings" Learning at the Centre. (April, 1994), p.8.
   Explaining what the peer tutoring meetings are about. Describes and justifies what goes on in meetings in terms of helping other students to grow.

9. Feeding requirements for dogs; (Winter 1994) UNEDITED
   Produced on the computer in columns, an informational sheet listing ages, weights, caloric requirements. Copied from another brochure.

10. "The Annual General Meeting" Learning at the Centre. (June 1994), p.9.
    A report written about the AGM. Mostly a selected rendition of what was discussed together with some personal opinion about what is important for the next year. He says that the AGM is a time when everyone - students etc. - who comes to the Centre and is a member gets a say in how things are run. He mentions the financial statements, bigger room, idea of counseling and his idea of increasing the frequency of classes to more than once or twice each week.

11. To Roy G., social worker, re: continuation of Support for Independence; (summer 1994). UNEDITED.
    Written in response to a letter from social worker indicating that social assistance may be terminated. It does not state why there either is a threat to terminate them or that they have already been terminated. I do not know with certainty, but Thomas did mention at one time that this had happened as a result of a report made to social services by Susan's sister that they had been receiving money from Susan's mother. Thomas said that the sister and Susan do not get along and that the sister is jealous of Susan's relationship with her mother. The letter provides information in a way so as to convince the social worker that the health problems that he and Susan are experiencing are debilitating and that he is upgrading at the Centre.

1995

12. Journal: One entry about his day (February 26, 1995); UNEDITED

Thomas was asked to maintain a journal recording what he did. He prepared only one entry and from this I infer that this task and this form of writing was not to his liking. This is not a story but a chronological description of his day with some opinion e.g. "What I hate about shopping is...." and some choice of topics such as his brief discussion of his dogs and dog breeding. It is informal but still guarded as if he is well aware that others may read it. He wrote about going shopping at superstore with his family and mother-in-law (finding parking space, who goes to buy what, etc., about buying a second hand freezer through the Bargainfinder and picking it up and the travails of getting it through the door, about his plans to move his computer downstairs at the end of the month, about relaxing, about his plans for breeding dogs and buying them and about a friend of Susanfs mother on the reserve who might want one and about having coffee and a muffin and going to bed. some dry humour written into this (feels like writing for "This old house" TV programme after getting the freezer into the room.

13. "The SPCA" an open letter - Jan 16/95;

    Prepared on his home computer in response to a news story about new conditions for getting a pet from the SPCA. Argues with the provision not allowing people on social Assistance to buy a dog or cat from the SPCA.

14. "Centre students Meet U of A students" Learning at the Centre, (May, 1995), p.4;

    The occasion of a visit from university students enrolled in an adult ed course being taught by Sarah and who have been pen pals with Centre students, is briefly reported by Thomas. During this meeting, a researcher has asked the Centre students to express what they mean by involvement, to state how they are involved in the Centre and why they feel that they should be involved. Thomas states these questions and gives his (?) answers: students can have the opportunity to say what they want and see what is happening (eg decision about where to move - not make the decision); Can be Board members and learn about budgets etc.; build self-esteem and other private, personal goals.

15. Letter to R., case worker re: daycare subsidy; (August 5, 1995) -

    two copies - the first unedited and the second after Sarah had edited it for Thomas; EDITED AND UNEDITED

Susan was required to attend a work skills upgrading course. Thinking that Thomas was attending the Centre full time, the social worker advised daycare for the children and sent an application for subsidy. The kids were enrolled in daycare. When the social worker found out that Thomas was in fact not attending the Centre in the summer because it was closed, the subsidy application was turned down on the basis that he could watch the children. Thomas withdrew the children from daycare when he learned this. He did not have the money to pay for the daycare already given. The letter to the social Worker is his attempt to convince her that he was innocent and the subject of ineptitude and that social services should pay the daycare costs incurred. Family. This is ultimately about family.

16. Letter to the City of Edmonton complaining about dirty conditions next door at the plastic recycling yard. (summer 1995) UNEDITED.
Thomas wrote this letter during a scare over the harm that could be done by mice carrying hansavirus. He felt that the plastics recycling plant adjacent to his house was dirty and mice ridden and that these mice might be harmful to his family. He wanted to city to protect them against this possibility by enforcing health standards at the recycling yard

*1s. Email: 39 messages total between us, 22 of which were sent by Thomas to me. (Wednesday, June 21/95 to Friday, March 29, 1996). UNEDITED.
Email is a recent phenomenon and the conversation about what it is remains open. somewhat like a memo, (more formal structure - informational); a letter (personal and informal); public (don't know who else might read it; exciting - technical); like being in the town square on a soapbox and being able to have your say; secret and democratic in the sense that everyone is equal because people don't know who you are or your class affiliation. A means to have one's say, to have a voice.

He sent 22 messages to me. How many did he send to other people and when he began to explore the internet, how many other messages did he send and in how many conversations did he engage?

On a few occasions - specifically to do with planning for the Men's Group - his email was a response to mine. Otherwise, he often initiated the topic of his message or at the least chose an aspect of mine to which he would respond.

1996

18. Ad to have computer parts donated to him. (August 1996) UNEDITED

Thomas prepared this with some graphics/clipart help from someone but not with help writing or editing (many spelling errors).He is appealing for donations that he will sell for reduced prices on the basis that he will be providing cheap computers to poor people.

19. "spring and sunshine" Learning at the Centre, (June 1996) p. 29.

about family again - announcing to all at the Centre the arrival of Justin Louis Casey Charlie, his adopted third child.

20. "Time and Change". Learning at the Centre, (June 1996). P.6.

He tells the history of the Centre's moves. Each move in this history is seen as a potential problem that is overcome. The problem generally is the student feeling uncomfortable and then getting to feel good about himself in the new place, then the cycle repeats itself.

EMAIL

Topics: (5/22 = 22.s% of messages): Wrote about his family, seemed intended to show how family-like they are and how he conforms to the accepted idea of a father.

(8/22 = 36.4% of messages).Wrote about dogs and computers - two items which he himself linked to a feeling of being in control of his life and of his situation.

(4/22 = 18.2%)